Narrative

European Partnership on Safe and Sustainable Food Systems for People, Planet & Climate

SCAR Strategic Working Group Food Systems[1]

[1] Convening Platform for the co-drafting process

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Why we need a European Partnership on Safe and Sustainable[2] Food Systems for People, Planet & Climate

The future health of Europe's people and the planet lies in our plate: the way in which food is farmed, fished, processed, distributed, valued, prepared, consumed and wasted must change to ensure that environmental, social and economic sustainability of food become core assets of EU's food systems, along with food safety. Research and innovation (R&I) is a critical resource for the EU in the transformation towards Safe and Sustainable Food Systems for People, Planet & Climate (SSFS). The prime condition for success is that a wide diversity of actors join forces in a partnership – with a mission for change. With the Green Deal, the European Union has committed to a radical transformation of its economy into a sustainable, circular and inclusive economy. It aims to transform the EU into a '*fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. It also aims to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts'.* The Green Deal is an integral part of the European strategy to implement the Paris Climate Agreement and the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Food systems are one of the central leverages for the transition; they are inextricably linked with the wellbeing of people and planet. This is reflected in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, which are at the heart of the Green Deal. They identify ambitious targets and objectives for redesigning parts of the food system, outline actions and pledge to monitor the progress towards them. The UN Global Food Systems Summit 2021 will address these issues globally.

The transition to safe and sustainable food systems will necessitate addressing a number of challenges. In terms of the environment, our food systems feature many unsustainable farming and fishing practices that lead to excessive use of nutrients, pesticides, terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity loss, declining soil and water health and quality, all exacerbated by high amounts of food loss and waste. In terms of climate change, it is estimated that food systems are responsible for 25-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions, strongly contributing to climate change. Unhealthy consumption patterns are leading to a triple burden of malnutrition of undernourishment, overweight and obesity, and micronutrient deficiency which in turn are responsible for a number of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers. Additionally, the globalisation of commercial food value chains and the highly centralised power in a few food systems actors cause problems such as increased social and economic vulnerability (e.g., many small-scale producers and workers in the agri-food systems struggle to earn a decent income), disconnect between rural and urban areas, unequal access and security of food and water leading to water- and food-related conflicts. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that within the context of robust food operations, many vulnerabilities appear, and that greater resilience has to be a corner stone of food systems transformation.

A transition towards more healthy, sustainable, safe and fair food systems is imperative, but also complex due to the barriers to change built into social systems and the many interconnections with feedback loops resulting in unexpected consequences, synergies and trade-offs. This challenge calls for a systems approach, which acknowledges the interactions and interdependencies between farming and fishery, agri-food production, food processing, packaging, logistics, retail, food services, household consumption and waste management. The relevance of the food systems perspective is to look for those synergies and trade-offs between the system elements and identify those that are conducive or are counterproductive to successful transformations; a holistic approach makes aspects visible that could not be

[2] Sustainable food systems provide and promote safe, nutritious and healthy food of low environmental impact for all ..(SAPEA, 2020. A Sustainable Food System for the European Union. Science Advice for Policy by European Academies. https://doi.org/10.26356/sustainablefood),

seen from separate perspectives. It aims to better understand these processes and their distant effects, to assess the systemic impacts of policies, and to find leverage points and 'game-changers'. Accelerating the transition towards sustainable food systems requires collaborative actions and work across boundaries. Multi- and transdisciplinary, as well as Responsible Research and Innovation, including real-life experiments, is a key enabler of this transition, as stressed by the Green Deal strategies and the Food 2030 R&I initiative. To do so effectively it will need to incorporate environmental, social, legal, economic, financial, cultural, ethical and philosophical dimensions in future R&I programmes, as well as co-creation with all actors in the food system.

To date, the relevant policy context, regulations and R&I programming and funding are fragmented . That is why a new European Partnership for Safe and Sustainable Food Systems for People Planet & Climate (SSFS) is needed. Many excellent R&I initiatives and networks are already working in the food domain at the European level.[3] These are often focused on specific sectors or actors of food systems, which can be an advantage in terms of critical mass and for addressing sector/actor specific needs. This approach has its limits when searching for solutions to complex challenges across the EU food systems. Gaps, needs and challenges remain. Moreover, the learnings from local and regional food systems initiatives are often not fully explored.

The **SSFS partnership** will foster the inclusive food systems R&I governance. Stakeholders from the quadruple helix[4] (policy makers, businesses, researchers and civil society) from different sectors of the food system will be brought together in this overarching platform, with the aim to strengthen science-policy-society interfaces and increase transformative potential. The partnership will coordinate, align and leverage European and national R&I efforts to future-proof food systems for co-benefits through an integrated and transdisciplinary approach. It will function in synergy with existing initiatives and build on their work, to capitalize on current R&I and initiate necessary new R&I, with a strong focus on impact and implementation. This will provide the scientific evidence, as well as the collaborative experience, to support the transformation of national, European and global food systems, making them safe, sustainable, within planetary boundaries, healthy, resilient and trusted – for everyone, and within planetary boundaries..

What will the Partnership be about

The SSFS partnership will enable network partners to co-create and deploy R&I actions in support of food systems transition. The objective of SSFS is 'to collectively develop and implement an EU-wide mission-oriented research and innovation partnership to accelerate the transition towards healthy diets that are safe and sustainably produced and consumed in resilient EU and global food systems'. The partnership will address challenges and thematic focus areas from a **food systems approach** in complementarity with other more thematically focused initiatives.

The SSFS partnership will deliver benefits in the form of better understanding of interlinked processes and their distant effects, identifying potential trade-offs and co-benefits, delivering systemic impacts, contribute to policymaking for sustainable food systems, and act on leverage points relevant to business, place-based, communities and/or government driven action. The partnership will expand the EU's potential for context dependent, socially embedded and responsible research and innovation (RRI) as well as changes in practices

[3] Including ERA-NETs SusFood 1&2, SusAn, CORE Organic, ETPs such as Food for Life, JPIs FACCE, HDHL and Oceans, EIT Food, EFFoST, PRIMA, Food, Nutrition and Health Research Infrastructure (FNH-RI), FIT4FOOD2030, MicrobiomeSupport and many others.

[4] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6e54c161-36a9-11e6-a825-01aa75ed71a1

relevant to production methods, products, food environments, dietary habits, waste and circularity, business models, institutions and policies.

The mission-orientation of the SSFS Partnership, will be informed and build on the EU Green Deal and its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies, relevant expert groups[5] on FOOD 2030 and SCAR themes, Horizon Europe Mission Boards and various programming and technology platforms to deploy across ***four thematic areas for transformative R&I****:*

- ***Change the way we eat.***

  Transformation of current food systems to improve availability, affordability, and uptake of nutritious, safe, affordable, attractive and sustainable diets is key to tackling malnutrition in all its forms and promoting health. Combining sustainability and health requires better understanding of the various strategies to bring both aspects into balance within culturally and culinary diverse dietary habits while adapting to changes in lifestyle and physical needs. Shift towards healthy, sustainable diets for all citizens requires better understanding of a range of switches in consumption towards nutritious and plant-based foods, and utilisation of the untapped potential of sustainable consumption of animal-source food and alternative protein sources. R&I is needed to improve food selection and safe production and to promote desirable changes in consumer behaviour, reorienting the food environment towards affordable, sustainable, healthy choices and reducing inequalities. Novel technologies and approaches can be used to better understand behaviour and guide food choice. Strategies for making diverse, resilient local food systems support diet shifts need further R&I. Possibilities of beneficial micro-organisms including bacteria, viruses, fungi, protozoa and their interaction with the microbiome for healthy organisms, resilient food webs and climate regulation need exploring.

- ***Change the way we produce and process food.***

  The EU food system must contribute to carbon neutrality and zero waste while staying within a safe operating space for preserving biodiversity, land and water resources. R&I should help producers in the EU to increase the diversity of healthy and safe food products based on sustainable production from land and sea while promoting fairness and inclusiveness. Special attention will be given to R&I approaches that build on the HE Partnerships and Missions[6] with linkages to safe and sustainable food sytems, in particular those that create circular systems, use natural resources sustainably, and foster healthy soils (e.g. agroecological and organic approaches). This necessitates R&I on novel practices and technologies in food processing and food packaging to make healthier and sustainable choices (e.g. algae, low-trophic fish species and invertebrates, protein diversification, mild food processing that preserves nutritional density and limits the use of additives, including salt and sugar) more exciting and easier to adopt while not reducing food safety. For effective R&I efforts, their design initiates from desired food systems outcomes and consumer orientation. R&I will explore enhanced circularity in food systems, through innovations in supply chains, regulations, and social norms for waste and leakage of natural resources in production, distribution and consumption. Reduction of food waste produced by out-of-home food services, retail and consumers requires innovative preventive projects and measurement. Digitisation of resource use in food systems and business innovation may support improved valorisation of side-streams and waste.

- ***Change the way we connect citizens to food production.***

[5] Food 2030 Expert Group ; IPFSS Expert Group, SAM Opinion Food Systems

[6] In particular the HE Partnership on "Agroecology Living Labs and Research Infrastructures" and the Mission in the area of "Soil Health and Food", but also the other HE, Cluster 6 Partnerships and those in Cluster 5 with a food and nutrition linkage.

Improve citizen engagement and consumer trust in transparent European food systems. Achieving this requires novel tools and practices for improved consumer/citizen engagement in food systems development. Innovating in local farming and food systems, short supply chains, distribution and business models needs support to foster food cultures with local and authentic products while maintaining vigilant against food fraud and food safety hazards. With a view of not compromising consumer trust and food safety in the transition of food systems, e.g. in the expanding use of novel sources of protein, new risk-benefit assessment approaches are needed to integrate and link safe, high-quality and sustainable nutrition including the development of new practices in complex local food systems. Research and innovation will contribute to fostering food safety, authenticity, integrity, and the necessary transparency across the food systems, through innovation in digital technologies, data-driven services or otherwise.

- ***Change the way we govern the food system.***

  Ensure effective and inclusive governance of the transition towards safe and sustainable EU food systems. This will support the use of evidence-based levers and steering mechanisms in local, regional, national and global transition pathways towards safe and sustainable food systems through R&I contributions to that support the design of food systems-related policies at all levels. R&I efforts may foster collaboration across 'food policy councils', rural and urban networks and city-regional collaboration models, regional innovation platforms and support involvement of a plurality of food system actors including non-traditional actors, e.g. from housing, health and banking sectors. The partnership would thus contribute to policymaking and implementation by providing R&I support to sustainable food system policies, including where relevant support to the future EU legislative framework for sustainable food systems. It will analyse the impact of governance in fields such as breeding, agriculture, food processing, retailing and marketing, food safety and international trade in order to identify aspects restricting the sustainability of food systems, practices in incentivising sustainable businesses (e.g. code of conduct for responsible business and marketing in the food supply chain) and examine ways to strengthen decision-making based on true cost accounting in farming, fishing and food business that also embed environmental and social externalities.

  A Horizon Europe Partnership should **make use of collaborative and integrated policy design and governance engaging stakeholders with coordinated bottom-up and top-down approaches.** The SSFS Partnership will invest in a new narrative for safe and sustainable EU food in the global marketplace, in which maintaining EU cultural diversity, quality and safety standards above international levels is considered an asset in global competition and the development of precompetitive initiatives for accountability and **creation of shared values in food is essential.**

The SSFS Partnership will advocate for a more extended view on food, not only as commodity but also as a commons and a human right and will achieve its ambition to coordinate, align and leverage European and national R&I efforts on future-proof food systems through ***five interconnected activities:***

- ***Joint funding of R&I for food systems transformation.***

Co-fund competitive calls pooling R&I funding from Member States agreeing on scope within the thematic focus employing a food systems approach at various scales (local, regional, national, EU, transnational and global level). This will also involve joint activity on public-private R&I: agenda-setting and legal frameworks for involving industry and SMEs representatives in programming and for involving SMEs in projects. This could contribute to implement the code of conduct for responsible business and marketing in the food supply chain that is an action of the Farm to Fork strategy.

- ***Launching a food systems observatory***

The observatory will create a European network to contribute to harmonized monitoring efforts by national research agencies/ministries on the sustainability performance of EU's food systems. At present capacities and protocols to monitor and map food systems drivers and outcomes differ widely across the EU. The observatory will build from future Farm to Fork strategy`s policy initiatives and develop protocols for defining and delineating specific EU food systems at various scales in the global context following science-based methods using data and modelling and translating these into policy relevant findings.

- ***Establishing a food systems knowledge hub***

The knowledge hub will deliver science-based joint protocols, benchmarks, methodologies and tools for food systems approaches in R&I action. It will also identify, collate and make available relevant knowledge generated from previous national and EU Framework R&I programmes. The hub will encompass a network of transformative research and innovation labs (FS-labs) for the co-creation of systemic innovations at different scales across Europe. The food system labs will be inclusive, multi-actor, inter and trans-disciplinary, and multi-sectorial platforms, with consumers, public sector, and all other actors in food systems (e.g. citizens, industry, retailers, food services, farmers and fisheries, investors, planners, policymakers, etc.) working together in the Living Lab approach, fostering diverse forms of innovation that starts from the pprevailing multi-objective societal roblems to be addressed and the associated risks, not from the need to drive technology uptake.

- ***Learning from initiatives in the SFSS and beyond in the knowledge hub.***

The hub will organise the sharing of existing knowledge and co-create new knowledge at transnational, national or subnational level, through joint protocols and methodologies for designing, organising and evaluating food system lab activities. Activities are 1/Community of practice/learning network for food system labs. 2/ Reflect on the value-added of the activities in the hub. 3/ "R&I roadmap activity". 4/ Innovation Nest: Liaison with existing tools (EIT Food; EIC; national incubators) for SME and start-up engagement including business development

- ***Knowledge transfer and competence building/education including scientific advice for policymaking.***

The SSFS will invest in three types of knowledge transfer and training on food systems awareness: 1/Develop education programme and competence building for food system transformation; 2/Knowledge transfer for scaling innovations and policy coherence; and 3/Science-policy interfaces in the EU at various levels (local to national), including an Intergovernmental EU/global levels. The activities in this area may result in the development of a Food Systems Mission for the medium-term. Particular support will be made to relevant EU Agencies and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, who are key research stakeholders that provide scientific advice for policymaking.

Governance structure of the Partnership

A possible governance structure of the partnership is described in Figure 1.

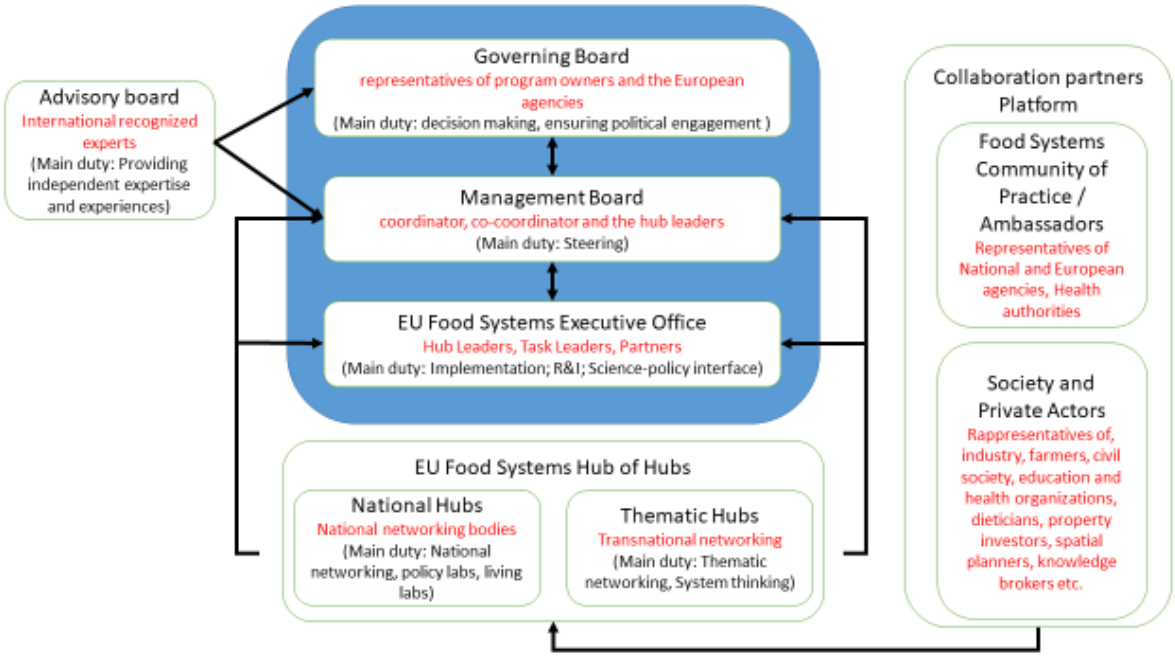

Figure 2. Possible governance structure of the partnership.

- **Governing board** (GB): the highest-level decision-making body. Will be formed by partners representing program owners across Europe and from the European Commission. It should also ensure that both macro and place-based priorities are considered.
- **Management board** (MB): will support the GB and is responsible for day-to-day management, initiating and overseeing the Partnerships' activities. Will include the coordinator, co-coordinator and hub leaders.
- **EU Food systems Executive Office** (FSEO): will implement the defined actions according to the established work plans, performing the R&I activities and establishing an interface between science and policy. FSEO will be constituted by the Hub leaders, Task leaders, and Partners.
- **EU Food Systems Hub of Hubs** (FSHH): will consider the National hubs (NH) and Thematic hubs (TH), which will closely interact with Collaboration Partners Platform (CPP).
    - **National hubs** (NH): national networking bodies regarding the thematic of the partnership, gathering the national expertise on these subjects and federating/framing relevant initiatives at local and regional levels.
    - **Thematic hubs** (TH): transnational hubs dedicated to specific subjects/common themes under the umbrella of the partnership, corresponding to "system thinking hubs".

- **Collaboration Partners Platform** (CPP)/Ambassadors: should include the representatives of the different actors playing a role in the definition and implementation of safe and sustainable food systems. CPP will consider the Food Systems Community of Practice, Private Partners, and representatives of diverse civil society and other stakeholder groups. A youth group or youth ambassadors system should be part of it.
- **Advisory board** (AB): provide advice to the MB on the planning and implementation of the main activities of the partnership.

It should be noted that the further elaboration of the Governance structure in the template would include a reflection on a most suitable governance structure for a mission-driven approach to the Partnership. It should include reflections on a potential role for the SCAR Food Systems Strategic Working Group, which is the convening platform for co-creating the Partnership. Also, a comparison of different governance models is then recommended.

Co-funded Partnership on Safe and Sustainable Food Systems

To speed up Food System transition the involvement of all relevant stakeholders is necessary. The **Partnership on Safe and Sustainable Food Systems** will be a co-funded partnership where the co-fund owners and the EC are considered as the first circle of partners in order to finance activities of the Partnership. However, the following elements should be taken into account for commitment and alignment of all relevant stakeholders: (i) possibility for in-kind contributions from both private and public stakeholders, (ii) the flexibility in programming and (iii) long-term implementation frameworks.

The advantages of the Co-funded Partnership model include the direct involvement of the European Commission (EC), direct benefits in terms of mobilised national funding being co-funded, and the possibility to design and implement a common programme *within* the Member States/Associated Countries, thus mobilising even more national R&I funding under a jointly programmed Partnership. This is an attractive and proven model that has served well in a large number of JPIs and ERA-NETs[7] experiences show modalities are possible to include private partners. For the private sector, contributing to sustainability goals is an important source of legitimacy and a driver of innovation, not to speak of mitigation of reputation and liability risks related to environmental or social hazards. Moreover, a **well-structured and balanced and sustained interaction between the private sector the public sector and societal actors on R&I policy can contribute to highlight the critical points of present and future regulation and help identify potential barriers to implementation.**

Traditionally, farmers' representatives have had a strong influence in the definition of the agricultural policy agenda. But when it comes to food systems, it is important to recognize that retailing and processing have a key role as intermediaries between production and consumption. **Alignment of private goals and public goals is thus a condition for success of public strategies . In particular innovative food businesses implementing the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork objectives could play a lighthouse role. .** Governance of partnerships should then be able to guarantee a balance between all interests (small and big, different phases of the chain, different sectors, geographical differences), and should be based on a clear commitment of the private sector in relation to common values, to public goals and the related targets.

[7] https://www.era-learn.eu/partnerships-in-a-nutshell/type-of-networks/partnerships-under-horizon-2020

Therefore, one aim is to find loci and leverage points[8] in food systems, where specific changes by conscious actors may create positive feedbacks from other actors in the system, resulting in transformations that catalyse co-benefits and synergies between healthy diets, behavioural change, and circular and affordable food production, processing and marketing with low waste and with sustainable outcomes. Such successful changes will require food systems inspired by research, innovation and real-life experiments and demonstrators. Hence, the Partnership will benefit if it can identify: (i) the nods where we as a part of the system on the societal level are underperforming and (ii) provide opportunities to **incredible partners** who can make a difference. **Commitment to stakeholders' involvement in the spirit of responsible research and innovation (RRI) in all stages of the Partnership (including the agenda setting) and consequent responsibility should be at the basis of any governance model.**

Progress monitoring and the Exit Strategy

The Strategies developed under the Green Deal, first of all the Farm to Fork and the Biodiversity strategies, identify precise and ambitious targets and **pledge to monitor the progress towards them.** The time frame of the Partnership instrument is restricted with regard to its activities. However, its remit and subsequent challenges are likely to exist well-beyond the lifespan of a network. A European Food System Observatory for performance monitoring, is likely to stay important well after Horizon Europe. Activities of the Partnership would gradually give shape to, and sustained by, a Mission on Food Systems. It is relevant to work on coordinated framework with Agroecology Partnership and other relevant initiatives (Eurobarometer action, Risk-assessment of chemicals, Digitalisation, EIT-Food) through joint meetings, common forums, coordination among SRIAs and possible joint calls.

Potential impact

The **Potential impact** of the partnership is strongly related to the **capacity to align actors** of the food system around the goals identified by the Green Deal and to quantified contributions to the objectives in the Farm to fork strategy. Besides, it should have qualified contributions to food and nutrition security, safety, efficient resource usage and economic and social aspects in food system approaches at EU, national, regional and local levels. **Its success depends on the transformation capacity of food system actors** towards more sustainable outcomes, via understanding of food systems, exploring system approaches, searching for appropriate leverage points and solutions, and overcoming barriers and trade-offs. For this reason, **impact will be assessed in terms of conceptual development** (capacity to introduce new concepts in the knowledge ecosystem), **technology development** (capacity to deliver technological solutions tailored to the variety of the emerging problem and to foster their market uptake), **social and business development** (capacity to provide knowledge to new social configurations, new business models and bottom-up initiatives), **policy development** (capacity to embody new concepts and new technological solutions into policies), and **territorial and context specific 'RIPE'[9] activities**.

[8] Meadows, D. (1999). Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system. Hartland, WI: The Sustainability Institute.

[9] RIPE = Research & Innovation & Policy making & Education.

The **success factors, or better 'Key Performance Indicators (KPI)',** are highly diverse and, thus, categorized. The categories, with one concrete KPI as example, are: *(i) commitment of stakeholders* (level of **political and financial commitment**), (ii) *contributions to more sustainable food system pathways* (level of **change towards a systems approach)**, (iii) *relevant focus areas in safe and sustainable food systems* (potential of a **focus area to establish leverage points)**, (iv) *alignment of activities at EU level* (level of **monitored alignment of European and national R&I efforts**), (v) *mutual benefits by strengthening local food system activities* (quality of the **network of FS-labs** in terms of exchanging best practices and co-funded actions), (vi) *performance of Partnership activities* (**programming structure** for management of calls and 'RIPE' agenda setting), (vii) *attractiveness and source of inspiration (via interactive communication) of the Partnership* (level of **spirit, joint ambition, belonging to** and engagement based on realistic success stories).

This narrative of the partnership[10] was co-created by the SCAR *Food Systems Strategic Working Group*, which served as convening platform for potential co-funders and stakeholders. A summary of the narrative is published as a factsheet. A stakeholder workshop on 1st October 2020 was the starting point for a co-drafting process, involving 47 co-drafters. In 2021/22 further co-drafting work will lead to a draft partnership proposal and a strategic research and innovation agenda. Potential co-funders will be contacted in early 2022 for indicative commitment. During this period, close consultation with SCAR, the other Horizon Europe partnerships, the Horizon Europe Programme Committee, potential actors and stakeholders will play a crucial role. The partnership is expected to be rolled-out in 2023.

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[10] Full narrative available at: https://scar-europe.org/index.php/food-main-actions/food-systems-partnership

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