

THE EUROPEAN FOOD SCP ROUND TABLE PLENARY

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SPEAKING POINTS

Thank you for inviting me to participate to the European Sustainable Consumption and Production Food Roundtable Plenary. I am pleased to see the first results of the FRT, and in particular the Guiding principles. DG SANCO contributed to their preparation by co-chairing the Environmental Information Working Group.

To-date most sustainable policies focus on supply-side measures. However, it is consumers' everyday decisions that have the most profound - although often indirect - effects on biodiversity.

83% of EU citizens say that the impact of the product on the environment is important when making purchasing decisions. Still, most of them would buy environmental products only if other key consumer needs such as quality, price and convenience are met.

In other words, consumers are very concerned about environmental issues but many are struggling to translate this into purchases.

We need to tackle the value – behaviour gap. Providing consumers with information is among the key actions which need to be taken. This information must be reliable and understandable in order to allow consumers to make informed choices. By providing such information, the industry has obviously the potential to become the positive catalysts of the needed change. However, the credibility of the information is a key issue: Today only 49% of EU citizens trust producers' claims about the environmental performance of their products.

Therefore, DG SANCO welcomed the invitation to cooperate with the industry in the framework of the FRT .I am happy that the first output of the Roundtable are the Guiding principles on voluntary environmental assessment and communication of environmental information.

Apart from the methodology based on the Life Cycle Approach (LCA), these principles also include requirements for the clarity and the comparability of information provided to consumers. This is crucial to enable informed choice.

We also need to learn more from the insights of behavioural economics, which show that there is much more than pricing behind behaviour.

Empirical evidence proves that consumers are often myopic: they overvalue the present compared to the future. This is an important element when considering behavioural change towards more sustainable consumption, and protection of biodiversity in particular. A marginal change of price does not always lead to radical changes of habit, because of the *status-quo* bias.

To better understand such biases we need to know more on the way about how consumers deal with information. Here again businesses can play a crucial role by providing or analysing existing data on consumer behaviour, mostly from various marketing research, and building a knowledge base of what works in terms of behavioural change.

We need to use all this knowledge to encourage the cultural shift from more consumption to better consumption. I am sure that business can support this shift and significantly benefit from it as new business models will be developed.

National Governments and the Commission are already supporting the change from quantity consumption to quality of

life (e.g. Dolceta's module on sustainability). Business should play the leading role, as it is business who has a proven track record of influencing consumer behaviour.

In addition, we should take full advantage of information and communication technology. Searching online is a primary source of product information for consumers. Barcode and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) scanning applications for smart phones could significantly empower consumers when making their choices. Other possible technology based solutions have been outlined in a recent DG INFSO report ("Consumer 2020").

Ending

Encouraging behavioural change is a challenging task, one that requires our greatest commitment. We need to reach a tipping point: once a critical mass adopts greener consumer behaviour, others may want to follow suit. Similar changes of social norms occurred in the past. I hope that consumers will want to get greener once their neighbours do. I am sure that the FRT has the capacity to support this much needed behavioural change.

Thank you.

End