

INTERNATIONAL DAIRY magazine



Farm to Fork Strategy: 2023, the year of delivery?

EDA Dairy Policy Forum 2023

„Farm to Fork Strategy: 2023, the year of delivery?“ was the motto of this year’s Dairy Policy Conference organised by EDA (European Dairy Association) on 8 March in Brussels. About ten speakers from all across the EU lactosphere discussed aspects of the F2F Strategy in front of an auditorium made up from over 180 representatives of policy, industry and associations, incl. two representatives from Ukraine. IDM reports from the event.



Giuseppe Ambrosi, EDA President, highlighted in his opening speech that three years after the start of the Green Deal Strategy in Europe, the EDA event had the ambition to evaluate how far industry and policy have come in terms of sustainable food production. One of the core elements of the F2F Strategy is labelling, be it origin, nutrition or sustainability with dairy farms having to combine all aspects of sustainability in their daily work.

No misleading of consumers



Food labelling in the light of F2F, was discussed by Sabine Pelsser, Head of Unit, A.1, DG SANTE, European Commission, Tomáš Slunecko, Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU, Emma Calvert, BEUC (European Consumer Organisation), and Dr Stephan Peters, NZO (Dutch Dairy Association) with MEP Paolo de Castro (S&D, Italy, photo left) opening the first session. He stressed that progress can only be achieved if the EU's sustainability project is built, science-based, together with farmers and not against agriculture in form of simple ideology. de Castro criticised some new developments in the EU Strategy, such as recycling of packaging, which was highly developed over the past years, must now make room for re-use of packaging. Or that nature has to be „restored“ which sounds as an accusation to de Castro as the EU has developed the largest (and most successful) food and agriculture system worldwide. While the US is steering sustainability developments using incentives (see the Inflation Reduction Act), Europe seems to bet on sanctions only. Putting food production emissions under the roof of all emissions was a mistake, said de Castro, as technical issues are mixed with short acting gases like methane. „We need a food labelling system“, said de Castro, „that does not discriminate and allows consumers an informed choice rather than influencing them“. With that he pointed out to the Nutri-Score that he thinks is misleading consumers with a simplified colour coding. The EU agrofood system is under attack, de Castro said, and requires special attention to prevent a decline of domestic production in favour of imports that are made under less strict standards than EU produce.

Current regulation is sufficient



de Castro was seconded by Tomáš Slunecko who said that according to the Czech government current nutrition labelling was sufficient and effective as consumers know how to interpret the information on food packaging. Front of pack labelling must not mislead consumers, must not disturb the principles of free movement of goods and must be based on science and verified by consumer research. A division between „healthy“ and „not healthy“ products is not acceptable, Slunecko said, pointing out directly to the Nutri-Score.

Sabine Pelsser reported from her work on food labelling within the EU Commission. Food labels have to be clear to form a basis of informed choices by consumers. The Commission aims at providing common rules for labelling health and sustainability information of food packaging and is in middle of assessment. The venture is most

complex as science and habits in the Member States have to be taken into account and discrimination has to be avoided.

Eco and nutrition labels have no effect



While Emma Calvert representing European consumer associations seems to favour Nutri-Score labelling as it seems so simple to comprehend, Dr Stephan Peters quoted consumer research from the Dutch Nutrition Centre on the gap between consumer intention and behaviour. According to Peters, two thirds of consumers favour eco-labelling as they think it would help them to make positive contributions to sustainability. But one third of consumers mixes up Eco-Score with Nutri-Score. The few studies that examine consumer reaction to the Nutri-Score label found that it does not affect consumer choice in the slightest way. The algorithms behind Eco-

Score and Nutri-Score are beautiful for academics but in reality there is no effect on purchase behaviour.

Living the Farm to Fork Strategy at farm & dairy level



The second part of this year's EDA policy conf was dedicated to sustainability achievements in real food production. Prof John Gilliland (photo left), Queen's University Belfast, has turned his lighthouse farm in Northern Ireland into a CO₂ sink. Proper soil and water management based on science and state-of-the-art measurement technology were key to this. Marlin Dammann, Lead Business Acceleration & Innovation, DMK, and dairy farmer Sven Kück (photo right), a supplier to DMK operating on of DMK's three Pilot Farms, described how Germany's largest dairy co-op and its milk suppliers are paving the way for a net-zero dairy industry – a commitment that shows the leadership of DMK in terms of environmental sustainability.