

VALUMICS WORKSHOPS SERIES

Recent high-level publications have explored what a sustainable European food system could look like by 2050. They all point towards three main elements: the need for dietary change, towards an increase in vegetal consumption and a decrease in animal protein sources; the requirement to reduce food waste and losses by at least 50%; and the necessity to redesign farming systems, by relying on a much greater diversity and an absolute decrease in the use of inputs. While such imperatives are clearly highlighted in the recent Farm2Fork strategy published by the European Commission as part of the Green Deal, their potential implications for food value chains organisation & governance have remained largely unexplored. Yet, food businesses (collectors, processors, retailers) are today key in shaping our food system and play an important social and economic role at the EU level.

Against this backdrop, the European research project VALUMICS seeks to characterise and develop food value chain transition pathways towards a sustainable, fair and resilient food system by 2050. In other words, it aims to identify the concrete policy and economic levers which will steer the transformation of European supply chains in the next 10 years. However, in this perspective, contrasting visions and underlying dilemmas have emerged over how supply chain actors and sectors should adapt to the pressing sustainability imperative, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. While some promote a market-led transition driven by internationalised value chains and specialised production systems, others defend the need to reterritorialize and diversify food systems notably through the development of a more local industry base. As a result, the debate often becomes a dialogue of the deaf and falls short of expectations to propose and move forward towards concrete solutions.

The issue of a 'protein transition' provides a revealing illustration of this bottleneck. Indeed, while the need to reduce animal protein consumption within the EU is widely acknowledged, the extent to which this should translate into a reduction in animal protein production is no settled matter. For certain stakeholders, EU natural advantages and high levels of carbon efficiency in pork or poultry systems provide a justification for increasing production and exporting it towards third countries with a skyrocketing demand. Others contend on the contrary that European livestock production should follow dietary changes and significantly reduce over the next 10-20 years, giving way to more sustainable plant-based and alternative protein productions (which in turn raises another debate about the most fitting alternatives). However, in the current COVID-19 context characterised by a strong necessity to maintain jobs, the economic prospects provided by the livestock sector - which currently employs a third of agroindustry workers (that is, 1.2 million jobs) – are not easily tossed aside.

Acknowledging underlying tensions and exploring in an open-minded way different approaches is thus essential to move beyond a sterile confrontation between two worldviews and start identifying critical solutions in a productive discussion around the main obstacles and levers towards the transformation of European value chains.

Bringing together diverse perspectives from policy making, business, civil society and thought leaders (science and think tanks), the W8 Workshop Series will define transition pathways for food value chain transformation, making clear both economic and policy implications. The objective will be to collectively identify and discuss specific lock-ins and leverage points likely to bring about more sustainable supply chains. To achieve this, the workshops will:

1. Build trust and common understanding of key scenarios
2. Explore and unpack prioritised lock-ins to achieving desired change
3. Focus on major leverage points and their applicability – geographical and sectoral
4. Build up transition pathways and related narratives

In blending an improbable network of twenty participants, we will recognise both divergence and alignment. Building trust and common understanding will be key to delivering a compelling outcome paper co-created and co-owned by all to present the main policy challenges collectively identified.

CALENDAR AND WORKSHOP SERIES KEY COMPONENTS:

October-mid-November	Workshop participants start engaging in dialogue through a collaborative iterative written exercise, initiated through a virtual Kick Off gathering . Two round of iterative exchange will inform the W8 Workshop Series agenda
Friday 6 November, 15:00-16:30 CET	
Tuesday 17 November, 15:00-18:00 CET	Workshop#1 virtual gathering: Series of active sessions considering key scenarios, a common destination and agreeing on weighted lock-ins
Tuesday 24 November, 15:00-16:30 CET	Touch point#1 3 x sub-groups meet for 1.5 hour for lock-in deep dives supported by lock-in briefing notes
Tuesday 1 December, 15:00-18:00 CET	Workshop#2 virtual gathering: Further develop policy asks and related policy impact pathways using the common narrative and vision. Longer working sessions interrupted by touch points for groups to share progress, request inputs and re-energize.
Tuesday 8 December, 15:00-16:30 CET	Touch point#2 3 x sub-groups meet for 1.5 hour for lever deep dives supported by lever (and trade-off) briefing notes
Monday 14 December, 15:00-18:00 CET	Workshop#3 virtual gathering: Value chain specific transition pathways developed, refined and adjusted. Narratives developed and commitments made to ensure collective progress.
Tuesday 12 January, 15:00-16:30 CET	Follow-up meeting to ensure co-creation process and collective validation of WP8 Workshop Series outcome document to be published at the end of January