

**How can we eat  
and consume.**

**Learning materials**

**for module 3**

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# How we eat and consume: sustainable food



## Question 1

How can we eat more sustainably and waste less food? **Take a look at the options** hereafter, **chat** about them with your group and **rank them** according to the solutions you think are best.

Points	Option
5 points	B
4 points	C
3 points	A
2 points	E
1 point	D

Ballot sample

- A** Food products should be **labelled with information** about their impact on health, the environment and the climate, and whether or not they are locally produced.
- B** Restaurants and food retailers should be required to be **transparent about their food waste** and work on reducing or stopping food waste.
- C** The price of food products should better reflect their **impact on the environment and the climate**.
- D** Agriculture should be radically transformed so that farmers use **fewer fertilisers and pesticides**, and opt for organic fertilisers where necessary. They should also be offered more support **to protect biodiversity** and have fewer harmful impacts on the environment and health in general.
- E** What **other solutions** can you think of?



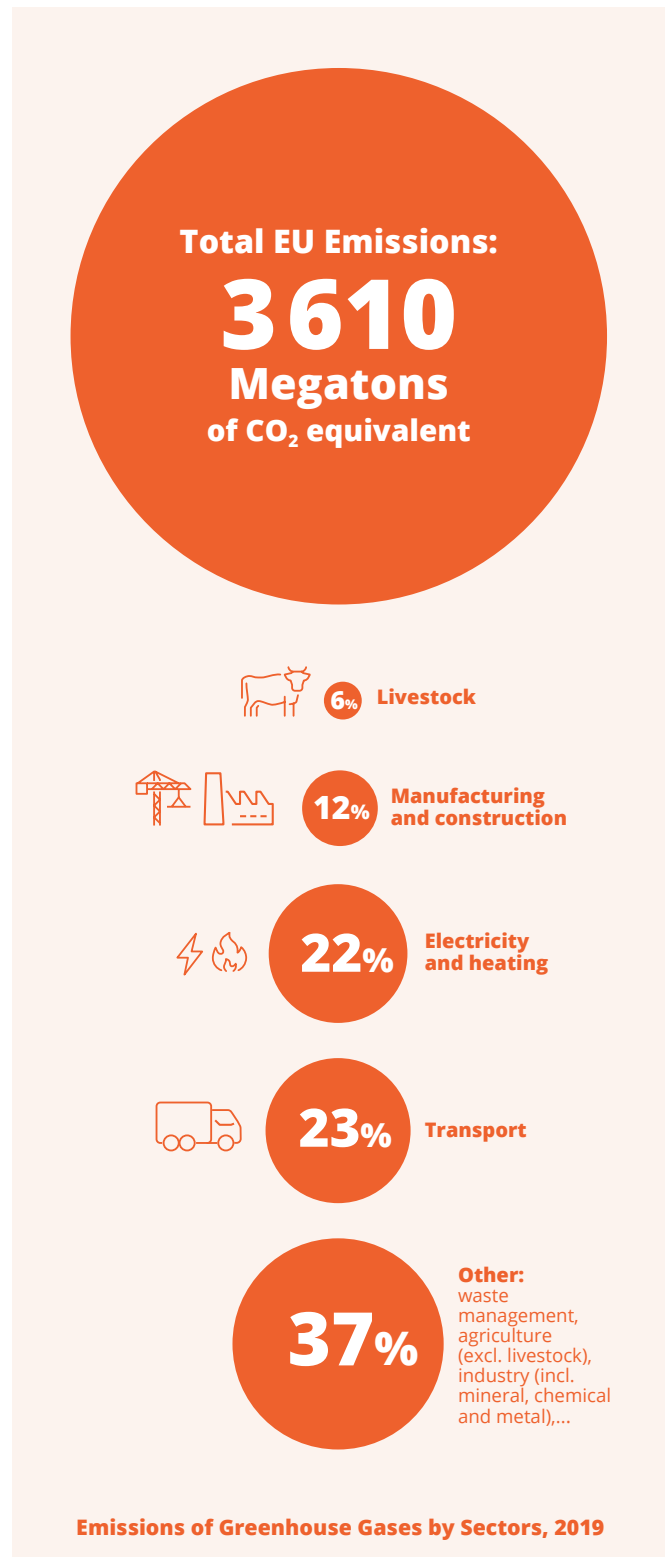
## Context

One third of global greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to the food system and its supply chain. This, includes crop and livestock production, changing land use (including deforestation), transformation, packaging, transportation and distribution, retail, food storage and preparation, and food waste at the point of consumption.

Almost 15 % of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by livestock production. Beef and cow's milk are the commodities responsible for the highest emissions, contributing 41% and 20% of the overall greenhouse gas outputs from livestock respectively. In Europe, agriculture is responsible for 10% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions, and nearly 60% of those come from the livestock sector. However, this does not take into account the benefits of farming animals, in terms of the amount of carbon stored in grassland and the rich biodiversity of pasturelands.

Current patterns of food consumption are unsustainable, both environmentally and from a health perspective. In the EU, the average intakes of red meat, sugar, salt and fat are still above the recommended levels. Moving to a balanced diet that includes less refined sugar and a more plant-based foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, will reduce not only the risks of life-threatening diseases, but also the food system's environmental impact.

The European Commission published its Farm to Fork Strategy in 2020 with the aim of making the food system fair, healthy and environmentally friendly – from production and processing to consumption and waste management. The strategy is part of the European Green Deal and aims to promote sustainable food consumption, support the shift to a healthy and sustainable diet, and reduce food waste. It contains several objectives for reducing the environmental impact of food production, including the target of at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land being farmed organically by 2030. This is approximately three times the 2019 share.



**2030 targets for sustainable food production in the EU**



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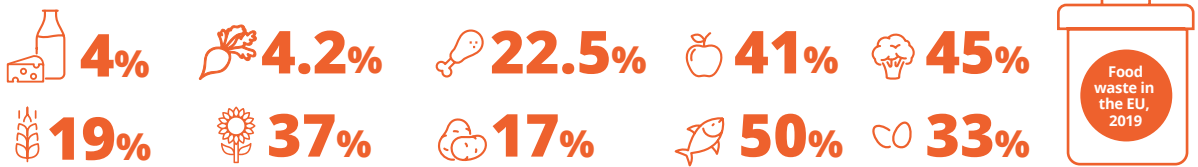
Clear food labelling is an integral part of transitioning to a sustainable food system, as it empowers consumers to make informed, healthier and more sustainable food choices.

Consumers are becoming more interested in information about where their products come from (in some cases, to support local producers), how they have been processed, and their core nutritional values.

There is no reliable data on the number of green food labels (ecolabels) that exist in Europe. The Ecolabel Index lists more than 70 ecolabels, including, for instance, the Carbon Reduction Label, which proves that the product's carbon footprint was measured and that the producer has committed to reducing that footprint. In a recent survey of 10 000 consumers in the EU, two thirds supported carbon labelling on products.

The Commission's recent Farm to Fork Strategy announced that a sustainable food-labelling framework that integrates nutritional, climate, environmental and social factors will be developed.





Food is lost or wasted along the entire food supply chain, especially during processing and production, in shops, restaurants and canteens, and at home. In 2011, 129 megatons of food waste were generated in the EU, which is equivalent to 20% of the food produced. Vegetables, fruit and cereals are the food groups with the highest amount of waste.

The European Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy proposes legally binding targets for reducing food waste across the EU. Some members have already set their own targets. In France, for example, food distributors and large-scale caterers in prisons, hospitals and schools are required to reduce their food waste by 50% by 2025, with commercial catering and others to follow by 2030.

According to the not-for-profit organisation Project Drawdown, food waste is the number one solution to rapidly reduce emissions from the agriculture, forestry and other land use sector (known as AFOLU), with a potential 90-gigatonne reduction between 2020 and 2050.

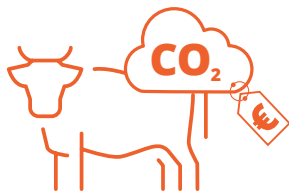
Households are the source of 52% of all food waste in the EU. The food-service sector (e.g. restaurants and caterers), and wholesalers and retailers (supermarkets and discount markets), together account for 17% of all food waste.

Up to 10% of food waste generated each year in the EU is linked to the use-by and best-before dates on food labels. Better date marking and greater awareness of what it means could therefore help to prevent and reduce food waste.

If it's not possible to prevent food waste, the best thing to do with surplus food is to redistribute it to people who need it. The Commission has therefore adopted the EU food donation guidelines to support distributors and recipients of surplus food.

Back in 2016, France introduced a law requiring large supermarkets to sign a food donation agreement with authorised charitable organisations. However, critics argue that even donating just 1% of a supermarket's surplus food is enough to meet this legal requirement.





According to the European Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy, tax incentives should encourage consumers to choose sustainable and healthy diets. So far, no country has introduced a food-specific carbon levy. That this kind of taxation could be effective though has been shown by research from Sweden: A hypothetical tax on meat and dairy items, the rate of which was determined by the specific environmental impact, would reduce livestock-related greenhouse gas emissions by 12%.

In Germany, food items enjoy a reduced VAT (7%) compared to non-food items (19%). The Federal Environmental Protection Agency has proposed to remove the VAT relief for animal-based products (and impose the 19% VAT), while at the same time further diminishing the reduced VAT on plant-based products. Meat and dairy products would become more expensive, while potatoes, carrots, flour, etc. would become cheaper, thereby mitigating unwanted side-effects on low-income households.

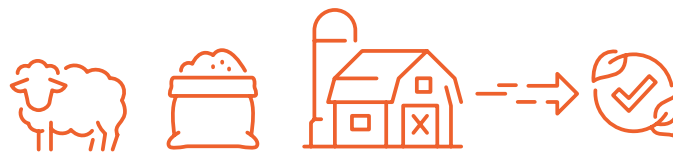
However, it is essential to make sure that vulnerable groups are not unfairly impacted.

Recently, the EU reformed its Common Agricultural Policy. The reform ensures that, in the future, small and medium-sized producers across Europe will receive at least 10% of the EU's direct income support. Moreover, one quarter of direct payments will be allocated for eco-schemes, such as organic farming and animal welfare improvements. Together, these new measures could make locally and sustainably produced food cheaper for consumers.



The consumption of meat and dairy products holds social and cultural meaning all over the EU, and there are some deep-rooted traditions around these foods. Changing behaviour will be a challenging, long-term process, especially given that vegan substitutes are not yet widely available or affordable.





In 2019 the agricultural sector produced about 10% of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions (sectoral trends by IPCC sectors in EU27), among others, as a result of methane from livestock digestion processes, stored animal manure, and nitrous oxide derived from fertilisers.

The use of chemical pesticides in agriculture to protect specific plants from diseases contributes to soil, water and air pollution, as well as biodiversity loss, and can also harm other plants, insects, birds, mammals and amphibians. The European Commission will take action to halve the overall use and risks of chemical pesticides by 2030.

Organic farming aims to produce food using natural substances and processes. Land that is farmed organically is about 30% more biodiverse than land that is farmed conventionally.

The European Green Deal has set a target of 25% of agricultural land being farmed organically by 2030. This is three times the 2019 overall share of 8.5%, although this share varies a lot among Members States (see figure).

In March 2021, the European Commission launched an organic action plan that aims to stimulate demand for organic products, ensuring consumer trust and supporting the move to organic farming.



# How we eat and consume: sustainable consumption



## Question 2

How can sustainable consumption best be promoted? **Take a look at the options hereafter, chat about them** with your group and **rank them** according to the solutions you think are best.

Points	Option
5 points	B
4 points	C
3 points	A
2 points	E
1 point	D

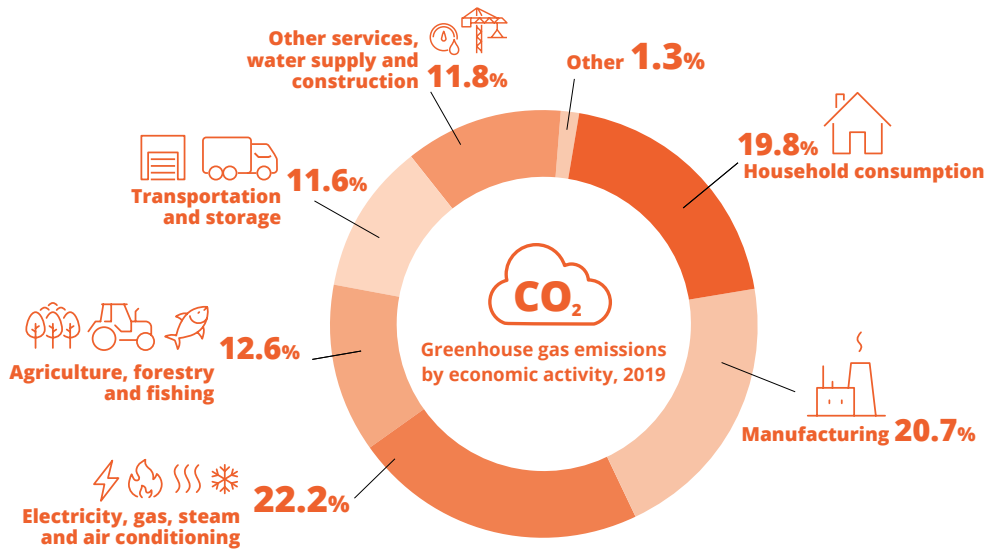
Ballot sample

- A** Companies and public authorities should be **transparent about the impact that their products and production processes** (and those of their suppliers) have on the environment and people's health, both in and outside of the EU.
- B** **The impact on health, the environment and the climate** should be better reflected in the prices of products. Consumers should also be given more information about those impacts (e.g. through labelling, enhanced transparency, digital applications).
- C** **The minimum warranty on electrical appliances** should be extended beyond two years, and producers should do more to make it possible to repair them.
- D** **Single-use plastic bottles should be banned** and there should be an EU-wide bottle return scheme for multi-use bottles.
- E** What **other solutions** can you think of?





## Context

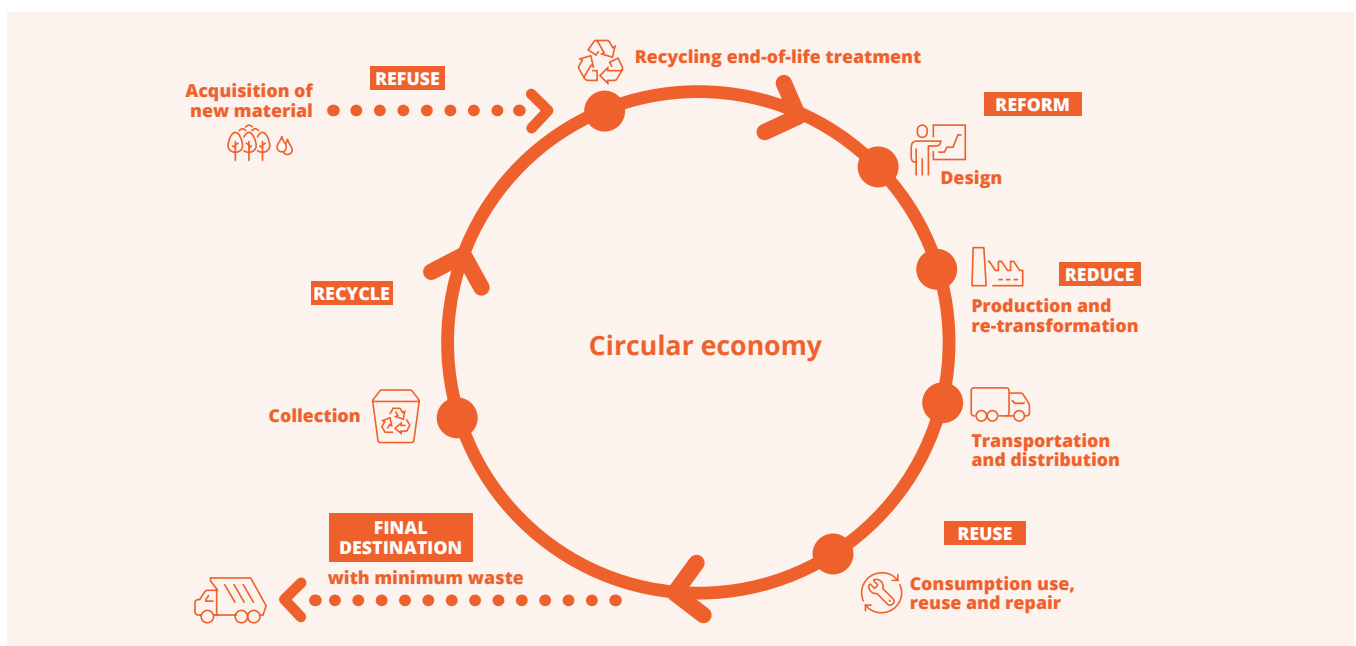


Household consumption accounted for almost one fifth (19.8%) of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, which is almost as much as the manufacturing sector (20.7%) and a little less than electricity, gas and steam production (22.2%).

Reducing net emissions in the EU by 55% by 2030 will crucially depend on people changing their consumption habits toward reduction, reuse, repair and recycling, so it helps that environmental awareness is already high among Europeans. In a recent Europe-wide survey, 94% of respondents said that protecting the environment is personally important to them. More than two thirds agreed that their consumption habits had a negative effect on the environment. Changing consumption and production patterns was mentioned most often as the best way to tackle environmental problems.

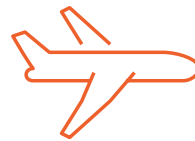
However, numerous studies have shown that it is not easy to change people's behaviour towards being greener. Consumer choice over what to buy and how to use it is influenced by many factors other than sustainability, such as price, availability, convenience, habit and social norms.

There are a number of EU policies that are relevant to consumers' ability to make sustainable choices. These include amongst others environmental product requirements, information and labelling requirements (including the voluntary EU Ecolabel), rules on product guarantees, and waste legislation that makes recycling easier.





## Supply-chain monitoring



Every company and product has an environmental footprint. That footprint is calculated based on a range of environmental impacts, such as climate change, ozone depletion, land use, resource depletion, water consumption, energy consumption and use of chemicals, as well as other social aspects. It takes a broad, comprehensive view of the lifecycle of a product and the company producing it (from extraction of raw materials and production to use and end-of-life management).

Companies currently do not have to calculate their environmental footprint. However, since 2014, EU law has required large companies to reveal information about how they deal with social and environmental challenges along their supply chain. The sustainability reporting delivered under these rules has been criticised for being difficult to compare and for not always addressing the most relevant topics.

The European Commission therefore adopted a proposal for a more ambitious regulation (the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive), which will require an estimated 50 000 companies in Europe to report on their sustainability performance.

It is important that claims on the environmental performance of companies and products are reliable, comparable and verifiable across the EU. Reliable environmental information would allow market actors – consumers, companies, investors – to take greener decisions. The European Commission will therefore adopt the proposed Green Claims Initiative, which ensures that any environmental claims made by companies should be substantiated using a standard methodology.



## How we eat and consume: sustainable consumption



## Warranty and repairing



Waste from electrical and electronic equipment (e-waste) is the fastest growing kind in the EU. In 2017, 10.4 million tonnes of e-waste were generated, which is just over 20 kg per person.

E-waste includes a large range of devices such as computers, fridges and mobile phones that have reached the end of their life, and that contain a complex mix of materials. Some of these are hazardous and can cause major environmental and health problems if the discarded devices are not managed and treated properly. Modern electronics contain rare and expensive materials that can be recycled and reused if e-waste is managed effectively.

A recent study shows that the actual lifetimes of products are significantly lower than either their designed or desired lifetimes.

The EU has policies and legislation in place to reduce the amount of e-waste and ensure it is managed properly. In 2019, product-specific regulations were introduced for washing machines, dishwashers, televisions, lamps and refrigerators, with the aim of extending the lifetime of these products by setting rules on the availability of spare parts and information about durability and repair.

The EU rules on product guarantees lay down a legal guarantee period of two years. If the product turns out to be faulty while under guarantee, the seller must either repair or replace it, and if that is not possible, they must offer a discount or return the money paid.



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## Single-use plastic bottles and return schemes



It takes at least 450 years for a plastic bottle to degrade completely. The process releases microplastics into the environment, and the effects of these are not yet fully understood. Plastics often contain potentially toxic chemical substances that may be harmful to the animals or humans that ingest them.

Plastic bottles are mostly made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET), a petroleum product that has a large carbon footprint over its lifecycle. It is estimated that about a quarter of a bottle of oil is needed to produce the actual plastic bottle. On top, it takes more than five litres of water to produce a typical single-use plastic bottle.

Single-use plastic bottles are also harmful to animals. Plastic bottle tops often end up at the bottom of the sea, where marine animals mistake them for food. Some choke on them and others die from the toxins that the bottle tops release in their stomachs.

The EU Directive on single-use plastics sets recycling and collection targets for plastic bottles. By 2025, plastic bottles will have to be made of at least 25% recycled plastic (rising to 30% by 2030) and 77% of plastic bottles will need to be collected separately (rising to 90% in 2029).

There is no planned ban on single-use plastic bottles. The environmental impact of such a ban may be ambiguous, because if reusable steel and aluminium bottles are used instead, then their environmental benefits largely depend on how much they are used. Similarly, glass bottles (0.75 l) need to be reused at least three times each to be environmentally equivalent to PET bottles (0.5 l), depending on individual sources and local circumstances.

The Drinking Water Directive encourages Member States to promote the use of tap water for human consumption with the aim of reducing the use of bottled water, and therefore the amount of plastic that ends up in rivers and seas.



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## How would you like to contribute to a climate-neutral Europe? Discuss and get involved!



Visit the [Count Us In](#) website and make a pledge today!

## How you can contribute to a climate-neutral Europe



### Eat more plant-based foods

Reduce the amount of meat in your weekly diet.



### Eat local and seasonal

Eat food produced in your region and at its natural time of the year.



### Cut food waste

Reduce the amount of food that is wasted or thrown away in your home.



### Repair and reuse

Repair your belongings rather than buying new.



### Wear clothes to last

Buy fewer new clothes and wear them longer.

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