

# European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians – *the voice of dietitians in Europe*

Judith Liddell, EFAD Secretary General



**Jean-Claude Juncker**

**President of the European Commission**

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Dear Mr Juncker,

The European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) calls upon the European Commission to support European agriculture to produce the foods necessary to sustainably improve the health of the people of Europe.

EFAD believes that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) requires an urgent assessment, to ensure it is equipped to address the fundamental challenges that Europe is facing in diet, nutrition and health.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) contribute significantly to avoidable premature mortality and morbidity across populations. These conditions also account for much of the gradient in health inequalities. NCDs reduce quality of life and increase the burden on the wider economy besides stretching under-resourced health services. NCDs are nutrition-sensitive and as such are of concern to dietitians whose work involves supporting policy, practise and education that enables more people to benefit from sound nutrition. We also recognise that our duty goes beyond promoting lifestyle change to tackle the social determinants of health (SDH), and that lifestyle and SDH are inter-linked.

Global food systems impact on the nutritional quality of foods that are available, affordable and acceptable to consumers, on food and nutrition security and on environmental sustainability and loss of biodiversity.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> The links between better health, the economy and environmental sustainability are well established: people who are healthy are better able to learn, to earn and to contribute positively to the societies in which they live. In addition, fair societies and a healthy environment are also prerequisites for good health.

Healthy diets should not be achieved without global consideration of climate change and the need for planetary sustainability. Dietitians recognize that promoting diets

**European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians**

**Secretary General:**  
Judith A. Liddell

**Postal Address:**

Ziegeleiweg 4  
46446 Emmerich am Rhein  
Germany

Phone +49-2822-68367  
Fax +49 2822-68358  
Email [secretariat@efad.org](mailto:secretariat@efad.org)  
Web [www.efad.org](http://www.efad.org)

**Executive Committee:**

**Honorary President**

Prof Anne E de Looy  
School of Health Professions  
Derriford Road  
University of Plymouth  
Plymouth  
PL6 8BH  
United Kingdom

**Honorary Vice President**

Annemieke van Ginkel-Res

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**Members**

Pauline Douglas  
Agneta Hornell  
Thérèse Libert  
Elke Naumann  
Tina Papoutsakis

**Registered Address:**

Fisconti Tax Consulting  
President Kennedylaan 19  
2517 JK The Hague  
The Netherlands

**Kamer van Koophandel  
(Chamber of Commerce in  
NL) registration number:**  
40215656

based on locally produced grains, fruit and vegetables with a lower intake of animal proteins will contribute towards minimizing climate change and promoting sustainability. This reinforces the need for coherent strategic shifts in the food supply chain, manufacturing and retailing and in consumer demand. However, practically no coherent initiatives have yet been properly implemented.<sup>4</sup>

As the focus of dietary guidelines is to shift consumer eating habits toward healthier alternatives, it is imperative that, in this context, the shift also involves movement toward less resource-intensive diets. Individual and population-level adoption of more sustainable diets can change consumer demand away from more resource-intensive foods to foods that have a lower environmental impact. This type of comprehensive strategy has also been used by intergovernmental organizations. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has identified the Mediterranean diet as an example of a sustainable diet, due to its emphasis on biodiversity and smaller meat portions and other animal-sourced foods, and the European Commission has developed a “2020 Live Well Diet” to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through diet change.<sup>5,6</sup>

To achieve these improvements, policy makers are exploring the possibility of developing guidelines for healthy diets that are also low in environmental impacts.<sup>7</sup> Recent analyses have highlighted the likely dual health and environmental benefits of reducing the proportion of animal-based foods in the diet and find that the monetary value of the improvements in health would be comparable with, or exceed, the value of the environmental benefits, although the exact valuation method used considerably affects the estimated amounts.<sup>1</sup>

EFAD fully supports the environmentally sustainable dietary guidance that includes a focus on decreasing meat and meat products consumption, promoting consumption of fish and seafood from non-threatened stocks, eating more plants (pulses, fruit and vegetables, whole grain cereals, nuts, seeds, etc) and plant-based products, reducing energy, salt, added sugars and saturated fatty acids intake, reducing waste and promoting local food consumption and production.<sup>6</sup>

EFAD advocates that, through judicious combinations of different foods, including the adaptation of the historical diet that best fits the eating habits, climate and agricultural tradition of each country or European region, we can lower environmental impact and enhance the local production of food while ensuring that a healthy and nutritionally balanced diet can be accessed by all.<sup>7,8</sup>

Future dietary guidance must also take into consideration not just what we eat but where and how food is produced, processed and transported and how waste is decreased.

Across the spectrum from intrapersonal to societal-level influence, public health dietitians are uniquely qualified to provide policy, nutrition education and interventions that can promote healthy lifestyles in a cost-effective manner.

EFAD would welcome the opportunity to work with the relevant EU bodies in addressing the issues raised and taking this forward.

Yours sincerely

Judith Liddell

Secretary General

### **About EFAD**

EFAD is the only professional organisation representing dietitians at European level. It is a federation of thirty-four (34) National Dietetic Associations from twenty-seven (27) EU countries, representing approximately 35,000 dietitians, which is half the dietetic workforce in Europe (personal correspondence, EFAD 2012). Thirty seven (37) Higher Education Institutes that have education programmes for dietitians are Education Associate members of EFAD, creating a wide network of professionals with an expertise in nutrition and dietetics. One of the aims of EFAD is to support Member Associations in developing the role that dietitians have in reducing inequalities and improving nutritional health in Europe. The European Specialist Dietetic Network (ESDN) for Public Health dietitians is a network within EFAD enabling dietitians to share best practice and expertise to improve services.

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