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***National pathways – Finland***

**Towards Sustainable Food Systems**

1. **Introduction**

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals is a leading driver of policy planning for the Finnish government. Climate, sustainable management of natural resources; economically, socially and environmentally sustainable food sector that is fair and viable for actors in in the production chain. Nutritious food for all, dietary education guiding consumers’ behavior, promotion of school meal programs, are key topics in national food policies.

Dialogue and stakeholder consultation is a tradition in the Finnish society. On the way to the UN FSS, a series of dialogue events was organized on national level, es well are on the initiative of private sector. In fact, the tradition of dialogue was considered one of the main reasons for the success of Finland in sustainability of the food system.

1. **Assessment - Performance of the Finnish Food System; strengths and weaknesses**

Finland was ranked number one in the SDG Index of the Sustainable Development Report 2021 published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network SDSN and the Bertelsmann Stiftung. The comparative study rates all UN member states’ performance in advancing Agenda 2030. Finland scored well in eradication of poverty, health, education, water management, energy, equality, peace and justice. Challenges were found in climate change work, sustainability of consumption patterns and production, and biodiversity. Specifically on the SDG2, Finland scores well concerning access to food, and nutritional targets, but has room for improvement in obesity and consumption of vegetables.

According to a recent study, Finland ranks number one in food security. The Global Food Security Index (GFSI) considers the issues of food affordability, availability, quality and safety, and natural resources and resilience through 59 indicators across a set of 113 countries

When asked about the strengths of the Finnish food systems, the participant in the series of national dialogues of the FSS highlighted the following aspects, among others: 1) There is a well-established system of the security of supply, covering all strategic sectors from energy to pharmaceutical products, and also food. It is operated by The National Emergency Supply Agency in co-operation with the industries and trade. 2) There is a tradition of dialogue and concertation in the society. Stakeholder are involved with the policy preparation. In the agro-food sector, the co-operative movement has long roots and has had a consolidating impact on the society. 3) The National Nutrition Recommendations are giving guidance to the public, institutional catering, health experts and dietary counselling. The NNR are developed by a board of experts and regularly updated. There is a good level of awareness about the recommendations and they are appreciated by the public. Nutrition education, linked with a comprehensive school meal system, is an efficient tool in public health policies. 4) Good level of education throughout the food system; world class research and development; aspiration of innovation, new products, also the open-mindedness of the consumers. 5) High level of skills in the dairy sector: feed based on homegrown grass, animal breeding and husbandry, dairy processing - a great comparative advantage. 6) Abundance of pure fresh water and an overall good state of the environment giving good conditions for quality production. The participants of the dialogues considered the following as weaknesses of the food systems:

The performance of the food system manifested good in the recent crises, both the economic crisis of 2007-2009 and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemia. There has been no significant market disturbances nor price chocks in the consumer end.

Sustainable agricultural production and food system is a prominent element in the program of the present Sanna Marin’s government program.

1. **Milestones along the pathway**
   1. **Science-based policy planning – towards the SDGs**

The government is planning sustainable food systems policies based on scientific research and evidence. The Strategic Research Council (SRC) of the Academy of Finland grants funding for socially impactful, high-quality science. The Government decides the focus areas for the thematic programs annually. One of these programs is called FOOD. Launched in 2019, FOOD looks for solutions for fostering a sustainable, healthy and climate-neutral food system. The food system refers to the complex of multifaceted connections between people, organizations, technologies, the environment and other production aspects, as well as biodiversity. Developing a sustainable, healthy, safe and climate-neutral food system requires research on, for example, agriculture and retail trade, interaction between different stakeholders, regulation, and the steering power of policy makers.

The Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry renewed its strategy in 2019. The ministry was the first in Finland to base all tis objectives and action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals SDG’s. The vision for 2030 in to have a responsible bioeconomy and circular economy from foundation for Finland’s competitiveness and wellbeing. The mission of the Ministry is to be facilitator of renewable and sustainable food and natural resource economies and a producer of reliable information resources. The organization of the Ministry was reformed a few years back into two departments, namely the Department of Food and the Department of Natural Resources. Abandoning the former production sector based structure helps to adapt the general approach of sustainable development.

* 1. **Initiating Society’s Commitment to SD - Nutrition**

Society’s Commitment to Sustainable Development is one of Finland’s key instruments for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It functions as a long-term sustainable development strategy for the Finnish society up until 2050. In addition, it provides an implementation tool3 for anyone in Finland who wants to participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with concrete action. Work on the operational commitments is a unique way to bring together the public sector, businesses, civil society actors and private individuals.

Nutrition commitment helps and encourages food business operators and stakeholders to improve the nutritional quality of the Finnish diet and to encourage nutritionally responsible practices. A nutrition commitment can be made in eight different content areas, such as the amount of salt or sugar, where significant changes should be achieved under the nutrition recommendations.

* 1. **Systems approach – interlinkages, inclusiveness, nexus, collaboration, multilateralism**

Finland stresses the importance of systems approach. Global food challenges are not only complex in nature, involving a multitude of stakeholders, sectors of economic activity, but also transnational, requiring collaboration and coordination between nations. On the national level, it is a tradition to consult various sectors across the society and involve all actors of the food chain. A consensus among food chain actors helps in guiding the consumers towards better, healthier and more sustainable diets.

The following examples in the field of food should be mentioned.

* **The Round Table on Food–discussion forum** is to provide the key private sector players in the food system with an opportunity for open and constructive dialogue. The main goal is to address asymmetries in the food system and enhance balance, so that all parties involved have an opportunity to succeed together. The tasks of the Round Table on Food include identifying changing trends, challenges and opportunities in the operating space of the Finnish food system. An additional aim is to help the entire food chain, including consumers, to raise the profile and profitability of the safe, healthy and sustainable Finnish food and food culture both domestically and abroad.
* **The National Nutrition Council** is an expert body appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The National Nutrition Council has already since 1954 monitored the nutrition and health of Finnish people and issued nutritional recommendations aimed at improving their status. The latest nutritional recommendations (2014) integrate sustainable development into the dietary guidelines and this work continues as on the Nordic level we have an update process going on regarding the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations (to be ready in 2022).
* **Nordic co-operation**. We encourage to collaboration on a local, national and international level. For smaller countries, collaboration is a tool to a share information and learn. On the Nordic level we have identified eight (8) opportunities for collaboration on sustainable food systems: 1) Define sustainable diets in the Nordic context, 2) Accelerate a social movement towards sustainable food, 3) Develop a tool to assess the sustainability trade-offs and benefits of different production systems, 4) Bolster the agricultural and food sector workforce, 5) Ensure thriving countryside and urban-rural connections, 6) Build an equitable and just food system transformation, 7) Address the out-sourced impacts of Nordic food systems, 8) Rethink a competitive export market for Nordic food.
* **Coherence in policies – One Health.** One Health approach recognizes and explores interlinkages between human, animal, plant and environmental health. The environment we live in and the other living organisms living with us influence on human health, living conditions and food available, and all that is reflected the functioning of individuals and societies. Three out of four new human contagious diseases are originally zoonoses. Therefore, co-operation between human, veterinary and environmental health expertise is imperative. Furthermore, local, regional and global scope, social, economic, trade and policy aspects need to be incorporated. In the international comparison, Finland’s works has been found efficient especially in the following areas: co-operation across the administration in disease prevention, combatting antimicrobial resistance, health in all policies principle. Finland strongly supports all endeavors to mainstream this approach internationally and in partner countries, targeting planetary health.
* **Coherence in policies - Food-water-forest-energy –nexus.** In the spirit of systems approach, Finland stresses the interdependencies between food systems, sustainable water management, sustainable forest management and energy. There are synergies to be gained. Finland highlights the role of forests in relation to water management, protection of groundwater, tackling erosion, maintenance of biodiversity, livelihood and stability of economic and social structures of rural communities – and to overall resilience of food and ecosystems. In international cooperation and development work, Finland will continue to expedite this thinking of coherence.
  1. **Nutrition recommendations, dietary education, school meals**

Adequate and nutritionally balanced food is a foundation for good health. Finland has a long experience in science-based national dietary guidance. In the framework of the National Nutrition Recommendations and the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations, information on good diet is distributed to all age groups, from maternity counseling to schools, families, institutional catering and old age services. Finnish people are well aware of the recommendations and appreciate the guidance. Nevertheless, eating according to the recommendations is still a distant goal.

Finland is a pioneering country in organizing school meals. Initially, school meals were introduced to address post-war poverty and malnutrition. At the time, Finland was also resettling thousands of internally displaced people and orphans. The law to provide meals free of charge for all pupils came into force nationwide in Finland in 1948. Finland has been offering free school meals for all students –For more than 70 years, all schoolchildren in Finland, from pre-school to secondary level education are offered a free-of-charge tasty warm lunch which is prepared according to national recommendations. This is the longest-running free-of-charge school feeding program in the world. Lunchtime is part of the educational curriculum, i.e. part of the compulsory school day, and is considered education. Lunch makes part of nutritional and cultural education.

School meal is an investment to the future. School meals improve children’s health, educational outcomes and equality, especially that of girls. Finland is ready to share its experience with other countries, provide with guidelines and other materials for developing school meal programs.

* 1. **The Climate Food Program**

In accordance with the Government Program, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has prepared the national Climate Food Program to develop a climate-sustainable food system and to achieve Finland’s climate targets. The purpose of the Program is to support the just transition of society to a climate-sustainable food system by taking into account all the dimensions of sustainability: environment, social, cultural and economic. The Climate Food Program supports the Finnish government’s target of achieving carbon neutrality in Finland by 2035.

The Climate-Friendly Food Program contributes to the targets of the European Green Deal of achieving climate neutrality and a just and prosperous society. The Farm to Fork Strategy, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and the Just Transition Mechanism are key Green Deal initiatives associated with the climate-sustainable food system.

A diverse group of experts from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry’s different units and departments took part in the preparation of the Program. This contributed to ensuring that a variety of views was considered, and that the Program was in line with other policy programs related to the subject. Key program include the program to promote the use of domestic fish, the *Catch the Carbon* program for land use, Finland’s organic production strategy, and the Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy. In addition, the Program is linked to the Strategic Program for a Circular Economy and the Medium-term Climate Change Policy Plan prepared by the Ministry of the Environment, the low-carbon roadmaps for industries prepared by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the climate change adaptation plan for 2021–2031 prepared by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. There is a large consultation structure and process tailored for this policy preparatory work, involving sectors, regions, scientific disciplines and political circles.

As an EU Member State, Finland is committed to the target of the Paris Agreement of implementing measures to limit the increase of the global average temperature to below 1.5 degrees Celsius. In accordance with Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s Government Program, Finland aims to be carbon neutral by 2035 and carbon negative soon after. According to the Government Program, this target will be achieved by expediting the implementation of measures that aim to reduce emissions and strengthen Finland’s carbon sinks and storages. The objectives of the national Climate Food Program include reducing the carbon footprint of consumed food and increasing knowledge of food production. According to the Government Program, the implementation of emission reduction measures must be socially and regionally just, and must include all sectors of society. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the climate-sustainable food system takes into account all dimensions of sustainability, i.e. social, economic, cultural and environmental sustainability.

The objectives of the Climate Food Program are: to increase the share of fish and plant products in the average Finnish diet; to reduce the consumption of meat to a moderate level; to make the production of meat and dairy products more sustainable; to reduce food waste; to increase the share of seasonal products in the average diet; and to produce added value with the side streams of the food system. A thorough monitoring and evaluation element is included in the program.

The implementation of the **reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** on the European Union is aiming at a significant climate impact. According to a recent study of the Finnish natural resources Institute LUKE the GHG emissions originating from the agri-food sector will fall by 0,9 million CO2 equivalent tons per year, i.e. 5,5 per cent. The main factors resulting this are restrictions on peatland use and clearing of land, better targeted rules on protective zones and cultivation of soil conserving plants. Runoffs of nutrients are expected to decrease; nitrogen by 17%.Positive impact on soil structures will amplify these developments. Still, more needs to be done. The government will continue to identify further emission cuts and assist agri-food sector in search for increasing energy efficiency and adaptation of new production technologies.

* 1. **Bioeconomy and circular economy – reducing food loss and waste**

The government is preparing a comprehensive strategy on circular economy, containing quantitative objectives and a concrete action plan. A process of consultations is underway. Equally, a renewed strategy on bioeconomy is underway. It aims at doubling the national value added of bioeconomy. Furthermore, the government is running a campaign together with the industry and other stakeholders to diminish waste in general and especially in the food sector. Finland is one of the leading countries in circulating packaging materials of food and drink products. There is an outbreak of new innovative packaging products in the Finnish R&D pipeline: recyclable, renewable biomaterials, eatable packages etc.

* 1. **Development policy, development co-operation, aid**

Finland’s development policy promotes the worldwide goal aiming at poverty reduction and the realization of fundamental rights, the rules-based multilateral system and the SDGs adopted in the UN. The objective of Finland’s development cooperation is to strengthen developing countries’ own societies, including the basis of their economies. Finland boosts the opportunities of people in developing countries to produce and source safe, healthy and nutritious food. Finland supports access for food producers to food value chains and markets in order to strengthen food systems and for the food systems to improve food and nutrition security, and increase access to income. Solutions to land governance issues are part of these efforts. Finland aims for the food systems of developing countries to be climate and environmentally friendly and economically and socially sustainable. This work also takes into account the interdependencies of food, water, forest and energy aspects.

1. **Nordic Co-operation, a benchmark of regional work**

There is a long tradition of cooperation between the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, including the autonomous regions of Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. On the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers, a comprehensive structure of activities exists, including the sectors of agriculture, food, fisheries and forests. It involves all substantial works of policy planning, the public administration and research. Some of the most successful achievements of this works include: a) Nordic Nutrition recommendations, a global benchmark of public nutritional guidance; b) NordGen, Nordic Gene Bank, a unique reserve of Northern agricultural genetic materials; 3) common strategy on blue bioeconomy; 4) Co-operation between the Nordic countries on forest fire prevention, control of invasive species, and others.

Under the Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the meeting of the ministers of agriculture, food, fisheries and forestry, ministers discussed food systems and got a debriefing from the FSS dialogue event held the day before. Based on these talks, the ministers gave a common statement on food systems reform. The statement is attached to this document.

1. **Timeline**

The multiple policy processes have their specific schedules, though all targeting to the 2030 objectives and time. The government has set a goal to reach carbon neutrality in 2035. Along the way, the main points of scrutiny are in the schedule of parliamentary election every four year, when a new government program is to be negotiated.

**Attachment:**

**Statement of the Nordic Ministers of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Forestry**

24.6.2021

**Towards sustainable food systems – the Nordic approach**

The ministers of Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry of the Nordic Countries - Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and Greenland, Faroe Islands and Åland Islands - had their annual Nordic Council of Ministers’ meeting (MR-FJLS), chaired by the Finnish presidency on the 24th of June 2021. The Nordic ministers engaged in a political discussion on food systems, and the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit. Introductions to the discussions were given by the Commissioner for international partnerships of the European Union Jutta Urpilainen, and the Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization Petteri Taalas. The ministers also received a report from the Nordic stakeholder dialogue on food systems, held the day before the ministerial meeting.

The Nordic Ministers stated the following:

The Nordic countries reiterate their full **support for the UN Food Systems Summit** and continue to work actively with the global community to reach a Summit leading to concrete action. Achieving Agenda 2030 goals including ending hunger, achieving food security, safer food and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture within planetary boundaries are amongst the greatest challenges facing the world today. Food related global challenges are often systemic in nature and should be tackled through a systems approach. This necessitates cooperation between local, national, regional, and global actors. The Nordic countries strongly support the multilateral system in addressing the global challenges. **A holistic approach** is imperative and all three dimensions of sustainability – economic, environmental and social – are of crucial importance. The commitment to an inclusive process is most welcome. Dialogue and consultation with all stakeholders in preparing for as well as implementing the results of the Summit is necessary.

Food is fundamental to life and health. The Nordic countries highlight a **human rights approach**. Equitability and inclusivity should be guiding all polices for sustainable food systems. Everyone should have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. The empowerment of women and girls is central in the transformation of food systems. Special attention should be paid to the poorest and the most vulnerable, and to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. We must address the asymmetries in the food system and strengthen the voice of those less influential. This underlines the commitment to a just transformation and to leaving no one behind. Furthermore, national or regional food culture plays an inherent role in a national food system and can be an important driver for change.

**Climate change adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable use of natural resources**

The Nordic countries have made ambitious commitment to carbon neutrality to reach the Paris goals and innovations to improvecarbon sequestration and storage are being developed. At the same time sustainable and climate smart consumption has to be further encouraged. Equally important is adapting agriculture to climate change, as well as to recognize the interlinkages between climate change and biodiversity. Promoting use of local resources and deforestation-free value chains requires action from actors at all levels. A holistic ecosystem approach to production is indispensable: the interlinkages between food, health, water, soil, forest and energy is a key consideration.

**Reduction of food loss and waste**

The Nordic countries work intensively on the reduction of food loss and waste.A third of food produced is lost or wasted along the food chain. This is not only a huge social and economic loss, but also a great burden on the environment and climate. Public-private partnerships, voluntary agreements negotiated between governments and food chain actors, monitoring, sharing of innovations and best practices and guidance of all actors in the food chain are needed for behavioral changes. A circular economy with upcycling of residues, nutrients and waste is part of the solution.

**Nutrition recommendations**

A healthy and sustainable diet should be accessible and an easy choice for everyone. Actors along the whole food chain, such as food industry, retailers and market actors, are all responsible. Nutritional guidance based on scientific evidence is essential in improving diets. The Nordic nutrition recommendations are an internationally recognized benchmark dating back over 40 years. The 2022 update of the NNR will integrate environmental sustainability into the dietary guidelines.

**School meals and nutrition education**

Systematic nutrition education guides healthy and nutritious eating habits. A nutritionally balanced school meal is proven to have, not only an important health impact, but also an essential role in improving learning opportunities and results, supporting also equity, gender equality and local economy. The school meal can also be used as a pedagogical tool, providing students with knowledge about sustainable lifestyles and healthy diets. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of schools, globally millions of children have missed out meals and essential health services. We need to support countries to get the children back to school, address increased child hunger and malnutrition, and recover from the long-term effects of the pandemic. School-based nutrition education is a Nordic tradition that is relevant in a global context.

**One Health approach**

The health of human beings, animals, plants and the environment are inseparably interlinked. The One Health approach is key to achieving health targets sustainably, by enhancing food safety and preventing zoonoses. International cooperation is needed to promote prudent and responsible use of antimicrobials, parasiticides, steroids and other pharmaceuticals as well as plant production products and biocides used in food production. This same approach is also essential in fighting antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This includes ending all use of antibiotics as growth promoters and routine prophylaxis in animal food production. There is a need for scaling up a further joint Nordic effort in international work. Healthy diets are also urgently needed for recovery from communicable diseases like COVID-19.

**Genetic resources**

The diversity of genetic resources for food and agriculture is crucial for farmers’ ability to adapt their food production to the impact of climate change and ensure the availability of safe and nutritious food. Farmers are the principal managers of both plant and animal genetic resources. At the same time, many of them face seed insecurity at the global level. There is a need to put farmers' access to crop diversity at centre in seed policy and practice. The maintenance of the genetic diversity that is the foundation of all food production must also be strengthened. The Nordic countries have taken action by investing in the storage of agricultural genetic materials in a Nordic Gene Bank, where the genetic material is at disposal to breeders, farmers and other users. We encourage other gene banks to make use of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault as part of their strategy for securing their important seed collections.

**Food from the oceans**

Increased production and consumption of safe and healthy aquatic foods from sustainable, healthy oceans and inland waters, may contribute to sustainable food systems and food security and nutrition within the planetary boundaries. There is a need to implement a science based and holistic food chain approach, from healthy waters to healthy people to achieve this. Increased production must be based on: transparent science-based advise systems for management, policy and business within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. We must eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and combat overfishing. The Summit should foster international cooperation ensuring healthy oceans and inland waters, sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture as well as sustainable safe and healthy aquatic foods in diets.

**International trade**

International trade, connecting national food systems into a global food system, has an important role to play in supporting global efforts towards the achievement of sustainable development goals. Open, transparent, and rules-based international trade can contribute positively to a sufficient, safe and healthy food supply for all. Trade should have an important role in fostering the green transition as well as promoting sustainable and responsible value chains.

**We - the Nordic countries - continue to strengthen the sustainability of our food systems at the local and national level as well as through activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers and other regional and international fora. We are willing to share our experiences, innovations and best practices in transforming food systems to more sustainable ones. The Nordic countries support transdisciplinary research and innovation projects for sustainable food systems, including through partnerships with third countries.**