

2021 International Year of Fruits and Vegetables

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly launched the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables 2021 (IYFV) on 15 December 2020. The IYFV is a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the important role of fruit and vegetables in food security and human health, as worldwide consumption levels remain low. Several European Union (EU) initiatives aim at boosting consumption of fruit and vegetables and strengthening sector operators.

Fruits and vegetables are essential for a healthy diet ... and yet not enough

While food is essential to keep human beings and all living organisms alive, fruits and vegetables are an essential component of a [healthy diet](#). The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [recommend](#) a minimum consumption of 400 grams (g) of fruit and vegetables per person per day. This diet would help to prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity, as well as to prevent and alleviate several micronutrient deficiencies, especially in less developed countries. In 2017, some [3.9 million](#) deaths worldwide were attributable to not eating enough fruit and vegetables. Insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables [is estimated](#) to cause around 14 % of deaths from gastro-intestinal cancer worldwide, about 11 % of those due to ischemic heart disease, and about 9 % of those caused by stroke. Low fruit and vegetable intake is among the top [10 selected risk factors for global mortality](#). Despite this striking evidence, we consume only [about two-thirds](#) on average of the recommended minimum amount of fruit and vegetables. The reasons vary from region to region, and are linked to availability, affordability and consumer choices. The world is producing more fruit and vegetables, but [a gap persists](#) between production and consumption. In 2017, world production reached [390 g](#) per person per day, but this includes non-edible portions, and loss and waste, which can be as high as [50 %](#) during storage and on farm in some regions. Healthy diets [are estimated](#) to be five times more expensive than diets that meet only dietary energy needs through a starchy staple. Consequently, healthy diets are unaffordable for more than 3 billion people in the world – according to the most conservative [estimate](#). The choice of a healthy diet is, however, not entirely dependent on [income levels](#). People in high-income countries in Western Europe and Northern America [consume only half](#) of the ideal amounts, and less than people in regions considered generally lower income, such as North Africa and the Middle East. This illustrates that, even when income levels allow consumers to make healthy choices, easier or more attractive alternatives (such as ready-to-eat or highly marketed food) often prevail.

Key data on fruit and vegetables consumption

Recommended intake	400 g per person per day
World production	390 g per person per day
World consumption	267 g per person per day
Affordability of healthy diet	3 billion people not able to afford a healthy diet
Deaths and health costs	3.9 million deaths attributable to unhealthy diets US\$1.3 trillion diet-related yearly health costs by 2030

Source: EPRS compilation from linked sources.

The hidden costs of unhealthy diets

Under current consumption patterns, diet-related health costs linked to mortality and non-communicable diseases could exceed [US\\$1.3 trillion](#) per year by 2030. A more graphic calculation of the hidden costs of current diet patterns shows that [for every US dollar](#) spent on food – economic, health, and environmental costs incur two more. Half of these costs relates to consumption: obesity, hunger, and micronutrient deficiency. [IYFV 2021](#) aims at raising awareness of the role of fruits and vegetables in food security and human health, and the need for global action to increase availability, affordability and promoting better-informed consumer choices. This will require large transformations in food systems with no one-size-fits-all

solutions. The [UN 2021 Food Systems Summit](#), scheduled for September 2021, aims at setting a bold agenda to transform food systems, as a crucial step in delivering all the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The fruit and vegetable market in the EU

Enhancing awareness to boost consumption

EU citizens' typical diet is no exception to Western norms, being mostly high in unhealthy food and unsatisfactory regarding intake of healthy food. To tackle the issue, the [EU Farm to Fork strategy](#) launched in 2020 aims at shifting the [EU food system](#) towards healthy and sustainable diets, of which fruit and vegetables are key elements. The strategy should empower consumers to make informed healthy food choices and change consumption patterns. On a positive note, daily intakes of fruit and vegetables are increasing (see table below) and fruit and vegetable consumption has seen new stimulus brought about by consumer recognition of the nutritional and health properties of such foods in a pandemic period. During the coronavirus crisis, the fruit and vegetable market has met [increased consumer demand](#), also thanks to [EU measures](#) which have helped to keep the single market open, ensure free movement of seasonal workers, and ease the market crisis management.

EU action to raise awareness of the merit of fresh produce consumption also seeks to involve young consumers, with the successful [EU school scheme](#), which provides funds for the distribution of fruit, vegetables and milk to schoolchildren, and for [educational measures](#) to reconnect children to agriculture and healthy food. The EU Farm to Fork strategy's [action plan](#) includes a review of this scheme by 2023, to focus further on healthy, sustainable food. The EU [promotion](#) policy (providing funds for information and promotion initiatives in and outside the EU), and EU [quality](#) policy (protecting the unique characteristics of some EU products), also contribute to boosting fruit and vegetable consumption. In both cases, results show improved visibility of fruit and vegetables, perception of better quality and safer produce.

Organising producers to make them stronger

EU fruit and vegetable farms include many small, traditional orchards, along with large plantations and greenhouses. Fruit and vegetable growers generally have to cope with fragile and quickly perishable products, extreme climate, diseases or pests, and a weak position vis-à-vis retailers in an unstable market. To overcome their structural vulnerability, producers can adopt innovations in many areas, including technological and resource-saving solutions, organisational improvements, and alternative production methods. The 2019 EU [Directive on unfair trading practices](#) (UTPs) contributes to strengthening the position of smaller operators in the food supply chain, especially those dealing with perishable food products. Nevertheless, the bulk of the EU [policy framework for the fruit and vegetable sector](#) is the common organisation of the market (CMO). This includes measures such as funding producer organisations to favour partnerships and increase the rate of organisation in the sector, and compensating farmers for their unsold produce. The proposals for the future common agricultural policy (CAP) move operational programmes for the fruit and vegetable sector to the national [CAP strategic plans](#), in which EU countries will delineate their strategy for the development of farming and rural areas [based on](#) current challenges and weaknesses.

The European Parliament has contributed to finding solution to the issues identified in the functioning of the EU fruit and vegetable market, including playing a key role in the [negotiations](#) on the Directive on UTPs, [identifying](#) weaknesses and proposing solutions. Parliament's position on the future CAP, currently under negotiation with Council, covers key issues for the fruit and vegetable sector in the [CMO legislation](#), such as improving market and crisis management measures, supporting producer organisation, and the EU school scheme.

Key data on the EU fruit and vegetable sector

Daily intake	364 g per capita (212 g of fresh fruit, 152 g of vegetables) – up by 3 % in one year in 2018
EU school scheme	An annual budget of €145 billion brings about 70 000 tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables to millions of children in 150 000 schools
Yearly output	100 million tonnes of produce from all over the EU, with some concentration in certain countries, €59 billion value (2020 estimates)
Trade	EU internal flows largely predominate; tropical fruit, nuts and spices dominate imports from outside the EU

Source: EPRS compilation from linked sources.

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