

Med agro-food after COVID-19. Some Issues to be tackled by the Mediterranean food value chain

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The Mediterranean food is well-known for being safe, nutritious and of high quality. It should now also become more sustainable and competitive in the local and global markets.

This can be achieved by developing a collaborative framework to provide national and overseas demand with a continuous supply of main food and feed for the local population and export markets of central and northern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle-East.

Although the transition to more sustainable systems is starting, it remains a big challenge to feed a fast-growing world population and bring food systems within a safe and fair operating space - encompassing economic viability and social welfare, and including human health. Current production practices and consumption patterns still result in air, water and soil pollution and use inefficiently natural resources, including water and energy, while some part of the food produced is wasted. At the same time, unbalanced diets contribute to obesity and diet-related diseases.

On the other hand, Mediterranean food markets are often suffering of large product economic value fluctuations under opaque governance and regulatory mechanisms. A proper analysis for the whole area source-demand supply is lacking and does not fully consider the potential exports and overseas markets influences.

The most remarkable objectives to be appraised Mediterranean agro-food sector in the next years should then be:

- 1) Develop more sustainable farming practices able to improve the use efficiency of external resources (water and fertilizers) as well as to combat land degradation and desertification. This should be appraised by applying a systemic thinking considering the entire agro-ecosystem and a multi-actor and multidisciplinary approach.
- 2) Achieving more competitive food industries able to provide and deliver more innovative and nutritious food in line with the Mediterranean diet habits.
- 3) Develop: 1) Competitive short supply chains for feeding local market making use of digital technologies advancements and 2) Global international Mediterranean commercialization structures with a common governance and regulatory framework using similar production and export standards and principles.