



Opening remarks

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Good morning all, delegates from consumer associations, partners of the OH-FINE consortium, colleagues.

It is a privilege to welcome you to Rome, Italy.

With my quick intro I just want to give some context on why we've gathered here today, from a policy and advocacy perspective.

As you know, the European Commission has outlined a vision for the future of farming and food production in the EU. It aims to create a fair and competitive food system that provides affordable and sustainable food for everyone. It seeks to help farmers overcome challenges such as rising costs, climate change, and supply chain disruptions, and ensure that Europe remains a leader in food production.

The goal is to build a stronger, more innovative food system that benefits both farmers and consumers, and helps feed the world in a sustainable way.

Announced by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union address in September 2023 and launched in January 2024, the "Strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture"¹ brought together stakeholders from the European agri-food sectors, civil society, rural communities and academia to reach a common understanding and vision for the future of EU's farming and food systems. Titled "A shared prospect for farming and food in Europe"², the report (delivered on 4 September 2024) presents

¹ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/committees-and-expert-groups/strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en

² <https://www.eurocommerce.eu/updates/a-shared-prospect-for-farming-and-food-in-europe-the-path-forward/>

an assessment of challenges and opportunities, followed by a set of recommendations. ~~In response to farmers' concerns, the Commission has presented options to reduce the administrative burden on EU farmers and is working on actions to improve the position of farmers in the food chain and to improve the enforcement against unfair trading practices.~~

In February 2025 the EU Commission presented a new vision for the future of farming and food production in the EU³: the roadmap builds on the work of the “Strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture”⁴, proposing key pathways for the future of agri-food policy until 2040. To make this vision a reality, the EU will be working closely with farmers, food producers, rural communities, and civil society to design a better future for agriculture and food in Europe.

In this context we can contextualize OH-FINE project, and more in general our engagement as civic organization devoted to protect the citizens' rights as consumer and to increase the participation of the so called "intermediate bodies" of the society in the policy making process at all level: local, national and European.

The final goal of the EU Institutions is to build trust and enhance dialogue to create an inclusive and cooperative approach that reflects Europe's traditions and values⁵. Its aim is to build a stronger, more innovative food system that benefits both farmers and consumers, and create an attractive, competitive, resilient and future-proof sector that values food and people⁶.

In order to reach these goals, we strongly believe in the active role of the citizens and their organization. For this reason, we welcomed the proposal to join the EU-funded project OH-FINE - Organic Farming Innovations Network Europe with the task – as today we're going to try to do - to explore, from the citizen perspective, the main

³ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/agriculture-and-rural-development/future-agriculture_en

⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/agriculture-and-rural-development/strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en

⁵ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/agriculture-and-rural-development/future-agriculture_en

⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/agriculture-and-rural-development/strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en

expectations, concerns, barriers and enabling conditions that currently shape the relationship between citizens-consumers and organic farming.

In fact, the transition towards more sustainable food systems does not depend only on technical innovation and productive capacity; it also depends on the degree of trust, understanding, accessibility, motivations, communication and engagement that the organic sector is able to generate among citizens. These are topics that we will, not coincidentally, have the opportunity to explore in greater depth during this two-day event in Rome⁷.

The today' European workshop in fact represents an opportunity for qualitative exchange among consumer organisations from different European countries, with the aim of identifying common experiences, priorities and concerns, while also recognising national and territorial differences that may influence consumers' attitudes and choices.

As my colleague will better explain later on, the discussion is not intended only to collect observations and viewpoints. It also seeks to support the identification of a number of shared key messages to ensure that the innovations of OH-FINE actually speak the language of the people.

Before to leave the floor, please let me remember what was said recently in the "2025 State of the Union Address" delivered by the President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen on 10 Sept 2025⁸ launching a new "Buy European food" campaign "*We can proudly say that our European food is the best in the world*". On that occasion, she also highlighted that "*in Europe, we have access to high-quality food that our outstanding farmers and fishers produce at affordable prices. They are also the custodians of our lands and oceans, our biodiversity. The key to our food security*".

⁷ 1. Trust, awareness and understanding of organic products; 2. Price, accessibility and availability; 3. Motivations, values and territorial specificities; 4. Information, communication and innovation.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_25_2053

Today, the OH-FINE project acts as the practical laboratory for this vision. If we want our farmers to be true “custodians of biodiversity”, we must give them the tools to protect the soil, our most vulnerable resource. We are integrating circular innovation—~~from compostable bioplastics to high quality compost~~—to ensure that organic farming is not just an environmental choice, but a competitive and efficient one. However, the transition to organic farming will remain a slogan if we do not change one fundamental paradigm: citizens as a consumer/final users and their associations must be recognized as primary and strategic stakeholders. Our presence today is in coherence with this message that we need to leverage at the EU level. I thank you for the attention and I wish you a great event.