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UEG statement on EU's Farm to Fork strategy

United European Gastroenterology (UEG) is a professional non-profit organization combining all the leading European medical specialists and national societies focusing on digestive health. Together, we act as the united and trusted voice of European Gastroenterology, promoting science, research, education, quality of care. We aim at reducing health inequalities across Europe and stand ready to assist the EU institutions with medical and scientific expertise across all the key aspects addressed by EU's Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy.

UEG welcomes the comprehensive approach within the F2F strategy. There is an urgent requirement across Europe for a considerable change in behaviors and attitudes towards sustainable food production and consumption. This cultural shift can effectively be achieved through a multi-pronged approach including strong regulatory intervention. Coherent EU and Member State plans and a whole-of-society approach are needed. We particularly support EU's determination to introduce changes within the food system enabling EU citizens to lead healthy lifestyles regardless of social background.

A multitude of digestive and liver diseases have been attributed to unhealthy diet, malnutrition and are consistently linked to obesity, digestive cancers, metabolic fatty liver disease, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), food allergies. Studies demonstrate that obesity can increase the risk of colorectal cancer by 50 percent, particularly in men. Healthy lifestyle choices, including nutrition, act as the most effective preventative measure against obesity and subsequent digestive diseases. Moreover, diet's effect on digestive health goes beyond obesity, given that a healthy diet has a protective effect from several diseases.

The difficulty we face is ensuring our citizens can make the right choices for their daily nutrition. We need the European Commission and national governments to act on initiatives to change the way in which we buy and consume food. This requires education on the consumer's side and strong regulation on the producer's side as well.

Our aim should be to achieve a European-wide transition to healthy diets by 2030. This would require consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes to double, and consumption of foods such as red meat and sugar to be reduced by more than 50% over the next 10 years. As an organization representing the field of digestive health, we would like to draw your attention to the areas addressing healthy diets.

UEG advise on a limited intake of ultra-processed foods, red meat (especially processed) and sugar sweetened drinks. With alarming trends in the levels of overweight and obese children, tackling pediatric sugar intake is an immediate public health priority. Likewise, there is currently a strong consensus that industrial trans-fats should be completely avoided.

The introduction of a comprehensive range of policies to limit the availability, affordability and acceptability of fast foods, while increasing the availability of healthy and minimally processed foods are desired. The measures include:

- Policies that restrict the marketing of such foods, especially to children

- Distinct classifications and front-of-pack labels on food products to more clearly indicate caloric and nutritional value based upon defined scientific targets for intakes of specific food groups
- Taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages
- Reformulation of food products and fiscal policies to reduce trans-fats, saturated fats and sugar content
- Legislation to ban the use of industrial trans-fats
- Subsidies to increase the intake of fruits and vegetables
- Promoting a change in eating culture from 'on-the-go' fast food consumption to nutritious home-cooked meals enjoyed with families, partners and individuals.
- Dietary habits are formed in childhood. Hence, educational programs for parents and education for children in school about healthy nutrition and cooking is desired.