

Farm-Fork-Microbiome Connection: Steps towards a healthier future

Event summary report

The event “Farm-Fork-Microbiome Connection: Steps towards a healthier future” was held online on **June 28, 2022**. The event was aimed to complete the series of webinars under the theme “*Understanding the Human Microbiome*”, a collaboration between **MEP Sarah Wiener** (Greens/EFA, Austria) and **United European Gastroenterology (UEG)**.

The series explored the **role of the gut microbiome in human health**, looking at the impact of ultra-processed food and alcohol consumption, with a particular focus on microbiome’s links to obesity, liver disease and cancers.

In the context of the existing comprehensive EU Farm to Fork Strategy and the upcoming legal framework set to reshape the food system across the EU, the event **presented the existing evidence** on the impact of diet and lifestyle on gut microbiota, with the aim to open up **a debate on effective policy measures for a health-oriented EU food & alcohol policy**.

Setting the scene

The two co-Chairs of the event, MEP Sarah Wiener and Prof. Patrizia Burra (Chair of UEG Public Affairs Committee) opened the event introducing the theme and the speakers and reiterating the vital role of the gut microbiome in many aspects of human health, in particular digestive health.

Alcohol, Nutrition and the Gut Microbiome - What does the science tell us?

The first session was dedicated to presenting the scientific evidence behind the “farm-fork-microbiome connection.” The presentation on behalf of Prof. Shira Zelber-Sagi underlined the **alarming liver disease burden** attributable to the synergies between **alcohol consumption, high sugar intake and obesity**.

Prof. Benoit Chassaing explained the role of the microbiota in health and disease and presented the results of the research he has been conducting on the **interaction between food additives and gut microbiota**, which showcase the disruptive effects of ultra-processed food consumption.

Enabling healthier environments - Policy and Tools

The second session combined the views from the consumers’ perspective and the European Commission’s research and innovation funding programmes. Floriana Cimmarusti, representing [Safe Food Advocacy Europe](#) addressed **the tools needed to achieve a sustainable food system** and the role consumers play in this transition.

On behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General Research & Innovation, Dirk Hadrich discussed the **EU funding of microbiome research**, touching upon the beginnings, results, trends and future plans.

Towards a healthier future - Key reflections & Policy pathways

The third and final session of the event focused on the **future of Europe's health**. Prof. Michael Manns, in his position as Co-Chair of the [EASL-Lancet Liver Commission](#), presented the key findings of the Commission: liver-related mortality is increasing and affecting young Europeans, 90% of liver disease can be prevented, therefore there's an urgent need for a paradigm shift to prevention in tackling liver disease.

Main takeaways

- **European crisis**

Europe is currently failing to manage the increasing burden inflicted by chronic digestive diseases. Moreover, obesity rates are set to rise, leading to one of the greatest and most significant health challenges we face today.

- **Prevention is key and should start early**

"The food is where all starts". With the Western diet predominantly consisting of refined sugar, processed foods and trans fats, it causes the gut to inflame which results into alterations in the gut microbiome and can lead to digestive diseases.

Effective prevention strategies targeting food include food reformulation, mandatory EU-wide front-of-pack nutrition labelling, food marketing restrictions (especially to protect children), mass media awareness campaigns and educational programmes in schools.

Alcohol combines synergistically with obesity and other risk factors, therefore alcohol control policies including alcohol labelling and minimum alcohol unit pricing are crucial.

- **Whole of society approach**

Food systems change must be systemic, coherent throughout EU and Member States and involve all relevant sectors to create environments for people and communities that are conducive to limiting the consumption and production of unhealthy foods.

- **Multidisciplinary research**

In alignment with the latest scientific practice and the EU funding prospects, future research into the microbiome should be increasingly multidisciplinary and receive further support from the EU's funding programme for research and innovation.