

## DEEP SEAS Thematic Capacity Building Workshop 4

### *Alcohol Agricultural Policy to Protect Health?*

#### **Workshop report**

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The workshop and related materials were produced under the service contracts **DEEP SEAS** (Developing and Extending Evidence and Practice from the Standard European Alcohol Survey - [www.deep-seas.eu](http://www.deep-seas.eu), Contract No. 20177113). The information and views presented in the sessions are those of the speakers, and hence represent their sole responsibility. Accordingly, the information and views presented during sessions cannot be considered to reflect the views of the European Commission and/or the Health and Digital Executive Agency or any other body of the European Union. The European Commission and the Agency do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information presented during the workshop sessions.

## Executive summary

### Introduction

The DEEP SEAS workshop ‘*Alcohol Agricultural Policy to Protect Health?*’ aimed to facilitate discussion and knowledge exchange on effective policy options to promote agricultural mechanisms for alcohol which protect human and planetary health and reduce alcohol-related harm. The workshop was co-hosted by the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ) and the Ministry of Health, of the Republic of Slovenia, within the frame of the Slovenian EU Presidency. It comprised two interlinked sessions.

Session 1: Thurs 4 <sup>th</sup> November	Session 2: Tuesday 9 <sup>th</sup> November
<b><i>“Alcohol, no ordinary foodstuff”</i></b> <i>Agricultural policy and alcohol production: the place of health in the equation</i>	<b><i>“Farm 2 Glass – informing consumers”</i></b> <i>Agricultural and promotion policy compatible with health and sustainability</i>

A total of 56 professionals participated in the workshop (excluding organisers); 46 in session 1, and 39 in session 2. A breakdown of participants by session, country and sector is shown in annex 2.

The main take-home messages raised and supported by participants over the two sessions are summarized in Box 1 below. A more detailed account of the presentations and points raised in the specific session discussions are given in the ‘main proceedings of the workshop’ section below. A fuller explanation of the main outcome messages is given in the conclusions section of this document.

#### Box 1. Main outcome messages of DEEP SEAS WS4 sessions on alcohol agricultural policy

1. Alcohol agricultural policy has an **impact on economies, the environment and health** but basic **underlying motives** (e.g., growth / reduction) may not be as divergent across sectors as they seem
2. We need to strengthen **communication and collaborative structures** between health, agriculture, finance, and other sectors; and for this communication and productive collaboration to be established, there is a need for **neutral settings** (at the EU and national level).
3. The **ambiguous place of alcohol** (not a food but on the table) creates **policy cracks and a lack of coherence**, leading to information gaps and mixed messages for consumers
4. Effort needs to be put into multi-sectoral systems to **incentivize and remove barriers for MS to lower the strength of alcohol products**
5. Future areas to be addressed include (broad) **Health Impact Assessment** of agricultural policies, **Cost-benefit analysis** and consensus building around **communicating (cancer) risks**
6. Conflicts of interests lead to **conflicting findings from different scientific groups** which stalls effective policy. Capacity on assessing evidence used for policy needs strengthening
7. The **environmental impact of alcohol product production, distribution, storage and consumption** needs to be assessed over the whole value chain, with comprehensive and transparent systems to report this, avoiding “greenwashing” (also on product labels).
8. There is public health support for **reducing or stopping funding for promotion activity by alcohol producers** (under discussion by the European Council), as with other products that harm health
9. Industry-supported terms ‘**drinking in moderation**’ or ‘**responsible drinking**’ have **no scientific definition or public health value**, and should be discouraged
10. MS health promoting action would be best supported by deeper **alignment among the relevant EU programmes**: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) and Beating Cancer Plan (BECA)

## Background

### The Alcohol Policy Capacity Building Workshops

The workshop was the final DEEP SEAS event, but the fourth in a series of seven alcohol policy workshops organised within the frame of the prevention strand of [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#), which pledges action to address the burden of alcohol-related cancer. The Cancer Plan aims to support Member States in implementing best practices to reduce consumption, recognising links to the EU Green Deal, the Common Agricultural Policy, and the Farm to Fork Initiative; reviewing EU legislation on alcohol taxation, unrecorded and cross-border purchases, monitoring implementation of the Audio-visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and measures to reduce young peoples' exposure to marketing, and to support Member States in implementing evidence-based policy and on-site and digital approaches to assess and prevent alcohol harm.

### The European context and topic background

Europe has the highest level of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm in the world. Alcohol consumption, even in moderate amounts, plays a significant role in the burden of disease, premature mortality, and costs to healthcare and society including from alcohol-related cancer<sup>1</sup> and other NCDs<sup>2, 3, 4, 5</sup>.

Paradoxically, many of the policies that impact on these lifestyle factors are largely designed by sectors not directly related to them, and often give priority to the profits of powerful economic actors, despite the detrimental impact of this on Member States' populations in the long run. In the case of alcohol, public health and policy decisions are often made or influenced by economic and policy sectors that are not directly related to health but have an important impact on health, well-being, and sustainability. One of these such sectors is the agricultural sector and practices.

## Methodology

### The DEEP SEAS Process

During the 2 online sessions panellists presented their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences, through short videos<sup>i</sup> and live question and answer sessions. Then, in small-group discussions, with a pre-assigned moderator and rapporteur, participants were instructed to reach a level of consensus on responses to a concrete policy question. Their discussion and points for further consideration were reported back to and discussed with the whole group to arrive at key messages and proposed actions to address alcohol-related harm through action on agricultural policy regarding both the production and promotion of alcohol products.

### Workshop structure

Each workshop session was structured in three parts: (See annex 1 for the workshop agenda).

- 1) Provision of information to brief participants and stimulate discussion – with slots on: Welcome/Introduction, Evidence Update and Stakeholder Perspectives
- 2) Small group discussion of a specific policy question
- 3) Summary and wrap up of outcomes and issues discussed.

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<sup>i</sup> The workshop videos can be seen on the workshop web-page: <https://ds-thematic-workshop4-alcohol-agricultural-policy.onsitevents.com/contenidos>

## Evidence review / background paper

Each workshop is supported by a background briefing paper to introduce the key points and issues for debate in the capacity building workshop. The paper gives an introduction to the workshop and the topic, and summarises key points from an evidence review undertaken by a recognised expert. A summary of the evidence review is in the following section.

### Session format

Instead of live presentations, the information was provided as short, pre-prepared videos, with the speakers, addressing questions intended to target their expertise and orient the participants to the most salient debatable points of the topic area.

The focus of the sessions and discussion questions were proposed by the DEEP SEAS/FAR SEAS Workshop coordinators, based on the expert scientific review, and refined through discussion with the topic expert, DEEP SEAS and FAR SEAS contract partners, particularly those representing the public administrations of Member States, EC policy officers in SANTE, and experts in the alcohol and agriculture fields.

### Workshop evaluation

At the end of each session participants were invited to complete an online evaluation survey provided in the session and immediately afterwards in a follow-up email. The brief survey was designed to be quick and easy and participants could choose to remain anonymous. A summary of the quantitative workshop evaluation is shown in Annex 3.

Participants were asked to give four quantitative scores to the session they had attended:

- Overall evaluation - How would you rate the session overall? (score between 1→10)
- The topics and aspects covered by the speakers were relevant for the overarching theme of the session (1→5)
- I learned actionable information for my work and/or consolidated my understanding/ knowledge (1→5)
- There was enough time and opportunities allocated for interaction with the speakers and between participants (1→5)

Participants were also invited to give feedback in three free text questions:

- Which speakers of the session did you find the most interesting/informative/engaging? (name, organisation or topic)
- Did you find any topic missing which you would have liked to see covered in relation to this session's theme?
- Do you have any comments or suggestions you would like to share?

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<sup>1</sup> Rehm J, Shield KD, Weiderpass E. Alcohol consumption: a leading risk factor for cancer. *World Cancer Report: Cancer Research for Cancer Prevention*. Lyon, France: International Agency for Research on Cancer; 2020. p. 68-76.

<sup>2</sup> Millwood IY, Walters RG, Mei XW, Guo Y, Yang L, Bian Z, et al. Conventional and genetic evidence on alcohol and vascular disease aetiology: a prospective study of 500 000 men and women in China. *Lancet (London, England)*. 2019;393(10183):1831-42.

<sup>3</sup> Imtiaz S, Shield KD, Roerecke M, Samokhvalov AV, Lönnroth K, Rehm J. Alcohol consumption as a risk factor for tuberculosis: meta-analyses and burden of disease. *Eur Respir J*. 2017;50(1).

<sup>4</sup> Rehm J, Probst C, Shield KD, Shuper PA. Does alcohol use have a causal effect on HIV incidence and disease progression? A review of the literature and a modeling strategy for quantifying the effect. *Popul Health Metr.* 2017;15(1):4.

<sup>5</sup> Boden JM, Fergusson DM. Alcohol and depression. *Addiction.* 2011;106(5):906-14.

## Evidence review

The workshop was supported by a background briefing paper, to introduce the key points and issues for debate in the capacity building workshop. The document gave an overview of the workshop and included an evidence review on the topic.

Below is a summary of the evidence review – the complete background document can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.deep-seas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DEEP-SEAS-WS4-Alc-Agri-Briefing-Document.pdf>

### Evidence review summary

*Agriculture policies and support mechanisms, including alcohol-related health impacts*

Author: Laura Rossi, Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria (CREA), Rome

#### Introduction

As alcohol beverages are made of agricultural raw materials, one policy area to consider when it comes to public health is agricultural policy. In this sense, it is important to take into consideration the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concept of Nutrition-sensitive agriculture (1), an approach that seeks to maximize agriculture's contribution to nutrition and health. In the area of alcohol production, this means reshaping production to include consideration of the potential health impact.

European agricultural policy and initiatives including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Farm to Fork (Farm2Fork or F2F), and the Green Deal all have impacts beyond economic and environmental considerations. In their current form, with regard to alcohol, these initiatives appear to be in conflict with other European policy objectives aimed at protecting health. A common ground needs to be found which better aligns and balances the objectives of these different policy areas and supports health and sustainability in the EU.

#### Methodology of the review

A literature search between July and October 2021 for peer-reviewed and grey literature on the presence and implementations of agriculture policies and support mechanisms, including alcohol-related health impacts was carried out. Inclusion criteria were articles and papers published after 2000, not limited to EU studies. Documents from the private sector were included. No specific exclusion criteria were applied, all pertinent documents were included and critically examined for the purpose of the present paper.

#### Key points

- The economy, environment and health are intrinsically linked
- Promoting healthy, sustainable diets is essential to tackle the increase in NCDs in Europe
- Alcohol use contributes substantially to the global burden of death and disability, particularly NCDs, including cancer
- The Green Deal, Farm2Fork and CAP have an impact on health
- Current agricultural policy is not aligned with other EU policies concerning alcohol and health
- Agricultural policy needs to strike a balance between economic, environmental and health priorities
- Alcohol is not a basic food and contains empty calories – it adds calories to the diet without containing any nutritional value
- Lack of nutritional labelling limits consumers' ability to make informed choices

## Findings of the review

**Alcoholic beverages, like sugary drinks, are non-basic, ‘discretionary’ foods**, without nutritional value, and as such, cannot be recommended as part of a healthy diet. The calories in alcohol are regarded as ‘empty calories’, in that they add calories to the diet without adding any nutritional value. However, under current EU legislation drinks containing more than 1.2% alcohol by volume are exempt from nutritional labelling requirements (2), limiting consumers’ right to know nutritional and health facts, and their ability to make informed choices about what they consume.

In recent years there was a **“shift” in several nutritional guidelines** from the previously recommended low-to-moderate alcohol consumption, to advising against any level of consumption, a shift mainly driven by numerous and growing evidence of the link between alcohol intake and cancer. However, this strategy is not unanimously shared by the entire research community, and in particular, by some scientists involved in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, where there is a persistent claim that alcohol offers protective effects against several diseases, based on the disputable existence of a J-shaped curve.

Evidently, the research regarding the protective effects of low alcohol intake on cardiovascular diseases in specific segments of the population (men 70+ for ischemic heart disease; women 90+ for CVD) have been progressively considered less relevant, and have been shown to be cancelled out by the other associated health problems and by the carcinogenic risks, at any level of consumption, when applied to the whole population, leading to the recent strong recommendation to avoid alcohol consumption to prevent cancers (3).

**Agriculture** occupies a unique position at the heart of the European Union’s society, environment and economy; and the common agricultural policy (CAP) combines social, economic, and environmental approaches on the path towards achieving a sustainable system of agriculture in the EU. These regulations regulate aspects such as the maximum vineyard surface allowed to individual EU Member States, allowed winemaking practices, and principles for classification and labelling of wine.

Overall, the EU’s wine policy is fully consistent with EU economic, and CAP objectives. What is lacking is a coherence between the EU’s wine policy and EU public health objectives. There is a dissonance between the CAP notion of providing a stable supply of “safe food” and EU’s official view that “alcohol related harm is a major public health concern in the EU accountable for over 7% of all ill health and early deaths.”(4).

Finally, the **impact of alcoholic beverages on the environment** is a topic of increasing interest related to water and fertilizer needed for their production. The Nordic Alcohol Monopolies (Alko in Finland, Systembolaget in Sweden, and Vinmonopolet in Norway) published a report assessing the environmental impact of alcoholic beverages (5), which identified the following three impact categories as the most significant contributors:

- Respiratory inorganics (air emissions: particulates, ammonia, NOx, SO2)
- Global Warming (CO2, CH4, N2O)
- Nature occupation (loss of biodiversity from indirect land use changes)

**Labelling** is part of the Farm2Fork strategy. Nutritional labelling has been found to lead to changes in consumer behaviour, both by increasing the number of people selecting a healthier product (6) and by reducing consumer dietary intake of unhealthy options. Nutritional labelling for food products has also been found to influence industry responses, leading to changes in the composition of some products (7). There has been less research on the effectiveness of labels for alcohol. At EU level, the 2017 European

Commission labelling report concluded there were no objective grounds that would justify the absence of information on ingredients and nutritional information from alcohol products (8).

EU Member States' requirements predominantly pertain to disclosing the list of all ingredients, as currently is the case in 8 countries; while other countries only have this requirement for beer. No EU member state is currently required to declare the nutritional value (although steps were made towards this with the still-to-be-enacted Irish Public Health (Alcohol) Bill which required listing the energy value for alcoholic beverages). No country uses rotating messages or graphic pictorials (photographs) depicting the harm done by alcohol (9).

## Conclusions

Food systems have the potential to nurture human health and support environmental sustainability; however, they are currently threatening both. Transformation to healthy diets from sustainable food systems is necessary to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (10). To achieve healthy diets will require substantial dietary shifts, including a strong reduction in global consumption of unhealthy foods, such as alcohol, as recently pointed out by Willet and colleagues, 2019 (11).

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the agricultural policy of the European Union, aimed at implementing a system of agricultural subsidies and other programmes and regulations. For instance, the European Union Wine Regulations (12) are common legislation related to wine within the EU Member States which account for almost two-thirds of the world's wine production (13). These regulations are part of the CAP and regulate aspects such as the maximum vineyard surface allowed to individual EU Member States, allowed winemaking practices, and principles for classification and labelling of wine. The regulations are based on a common strategy by stakeholders and regulatory tools to adjust supply to demand, i.e., to regulate total production in order to combat overproduction of wine and to underpin Protected Designations of Origin. It is also important to mention that the wine sector has been an exception to the CAP deregulation process.

However, beyond regulating production, the CAP does not relate to nor has it been harmonised with regulations on age limits for buying or drinking alcohol, advertising, retailing, or pricing; and, thus, it does not consider the collateral impact of its regulations on public health and safety aspects associated with the amount of wine supplied to the market. Since the volume and quality of production of alcoholic beverages is fully dependent on the raw materials coming from the agriculture, it is essential to identify and analyse the crossing points and conflicting areas between alcohol and public health policies and agricultural policy in order to identify trends, challenges and opportunities with a view to the future modifications of the CAP and with the intention to show the cross-impact between health policies and other policy areas as required from the Farm2Fork strategy.

We need end the false dichotomy of production and health considering that agriculture and health are intimately connected. Good food is essential for a healthy life. The CAP was successful in tackling food insufficiency in post-war Europe. However, despite numerous reforms, it fails to meet the public health challenges of today. Unhealthy diets, smoking and harmful alcohol consumption are key causes of chronic diseases, responsible for the overwhelming majority of Europe's burden of mortality and disease. There is a need to develop and put in place actions and recommendations for ways to enhance coherence between the agricultural production and public health.



## Review references

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13. [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/wine/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/wine/index_en.htm)

## Main proceedings of the workshop

### Workshop structure

Each of the 2 sessions of the workshop comprised of three parts:

*3 presentation slots followed by live Q&A*

- Welcome and introduction
- Evidence brief
- Stakeholder perspectives

*Small breakout group discussions* to tackle a specific policy question.

*Summary and wrap up* of the outcomes and issues raised in the workshop.

### Session 1: Agricultural policy and alcohol production, Thurs 4th Nov 2021

Welcome and Introduction to the session: Toni Gual, FCRB (chair) / Slovenian co-hosts

**Vesna Marinko**, Head of Division, Health Promotion and Prevention of Addictions, Directorate for Public Health, Ministry of Health, Republic of Slovenia, welcomed all to the meeting on behalf of the Slovenian hosts

**Claire Bury**, Deputy Director General of DG SANTE, in the European Commission & Responsible for Food Sustainability and the Farm to Fork Strategy, introduced the EU policy context, the frame of the EU Farm2Fork initiative, and relevant aspects relating to alcohol.

**João Onofre**, Head of Unit, Wine, spirits and horticultural products, DG AGRI, in the European Commission, presented the perspective of DG AGRI regarding the frame of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) governing alcohol agricultural regulation.

#### Evidence update

**Laura Rossi**, Researcher, Council for Research on Economics and Agricultural (CREA), Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, Italy, gave an overview of recent scientific developments and key messages for health in alcohol agricultural policy, highlighting priorities for the food system and regulating primary production.

In the discussion after these presentations, it was highlighted that one obstacle to health in EU Food regulations is the binding of "Quality" certification to "alcohol Level" - e.g., that certain Spirits cannot be below 40% and the terms are protected and cannot be used for alcohol-reduced products. This is a stumbling block in terms of aligning industry incentives with health priorities.

Multi-stakeholder experiences: Fleur Braddick, FCRB (chair)

**Joao Breda**, Head, European Office for Prevention and Control of NCDs, Programme Manager for Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, at the WHO, provided food for thought and the WHO perspective on tailoring agricultural policy mechanisms to tackle NCDs.

**Michele Cecchini**, Leader of the Work Programme on Public Health, OECD, presented insights from the recent OECD report on the economic costs of alcohol production and gave the economic perspective on potential adjustments to result in health gains.

**Nikolai Pushkarev**, Policy Coordinator on Food Systems & NCD Prevention, EPHA, summarised the main points of concern from a public health perspective of the CAP and F2F strategy, and highlighted the benefits and implications of a food environment approach to policy making in the area of alcohol agricultural production.

#### Breakout discussion

Participants were placed in small groups to discuss the question:

*How can EU Member States be supported to collaborate across sectors and reach balanced priorities for agricultural systems to reduce alcohol harm? (3-5 mechanisms)*

#### Feedback from discussions

The following points were made by the group rapporteurs and moderators in the feedback and wrap-up sessions:

- There is a lack of communication and collaboration between health and agriculture, at the national and European levels, which requires a system of structured meetings or some other mechanism to initiate communication and overcome barriers.
- There was agreement that this process of communication needs to be on neutral ground (not organised by health or agricultural institutions), and not too formal (as the Alcohol Health Forum was), to encourage non-biased agendas and discussions
- The environmental sector could perhaps be a more neutral host for debates on alcohol.
- While Health Impact Assessment is already a part of some non-health policy areas it is not at all developed in the agricultural sector for alcohol.
- A main source of incoherence is the incompatibility of two messages: 1) that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption (from a health perspective) vs. 2) the message of ‘moderate consumption’ (promoted by the industry and agricultural policy mechanisms)
- The difficulty of disentangling evidence from conflicts of interest was highlighted, with some participants pointing to conflicts of interest on both sides (economic interests and self-motivated interest of health researchers/academics)
- There was a call for more transparency over methodology to generate evidence in policy sectors, and to strive for more rigorous criteria on the robustness of evidence (e.g., on the health harms of alcohol referenced by the agricultural sector, or on consumer behaviour in the face of nutritional labelling). One interesting paper related to this is: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34607052/>
- Many of the discussions addressed the need to raise awareness among consumers, but it was also pointed out that the lessons from the tobacco field has shown us that awareness alone is not sufficient to protect health – further supporting policy measures are also needed.
- The session concluded with the point that the F2F strategy and Green Deal present opportunities to strengthen European public health, but that, to do this, the links between agriculture and alcohol need to be clearly seen and acted on with nutrition and health at the centre and with concrete actions and objectives in mind (such as reducing the grammes of ethanol in the European market).

## Session 2: Farm 2 Glass – informing consumers - Agricultural and promotion policy compatible with health and sustainability

Welcome and Introduction to the session: Fleur Braddick, FCRB (chair) / EC & Slovenian hosts

**Ada Hocevar Grom**, Head of Centre for Analysis and Development of Health, National Institute of Public Health Slovenia, welcomed participants back on behalf of the hosting Member State, and gave an overview of the NIJZ work in this area of agricultural mechanisms relating to nutrition and health in Slovenia.

**Christina Gerstgrasser**, Head of Unit External communication and promotion policy, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission, introduced the frame of the Agrifood Promotion Policy (Regulation 1144/2014) in DG AGRI, and the ongoing consultation process to revise this regulation and opportunities for health promoting objectives to be strengthened.

### Evidence update

**Laura Rossi**, Researcher, Council for Research on Economics and Agricultural (CREA), Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, Italy, summarised key scientific messages on agricultural policy impacting the *promotion* of alcohol products, including labelling.

Discussions related to these presentations highlighted the following points:

- The results of the DG AGRI public consultation by Ecorys, who carried out the analysis of responses, is available on the webpage of the promotion policy conference (scroll down to the Ecorys presentation) [https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/promotion-policy-review-conference-2021-jul-12\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/promotion-policy-review-conference-2021-jul-12_en)
- The guidance for those applying for promotion funds (including those for responsible drinking) relies on relevant national regulations or guidelines in the field of public health, in the Member State where the programme will be carried out, and these must be referenced in the funding application (e.g., national webpage or other media provided by the national health authority that informs about responsible alcohol consumptions or the risks related to non-responsible alcohol consumption.)

### EU multi-stakeholder perspectives

**Katherine Severi**, Director of the Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS), based in the UK, gave a presentation on the implications of research and findings on the environmental impact of alcohol production, across the value chain, and highlighting the multiple priorities faced by food systems and used by industry to promote alcohol products.

**Joao Breda**, Head, European Office for Prevention and Control of NCDs, Programme Manager for Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, at the WHO, discussed Agriculture promotion mechanisms from the WHO perspective, including the need to balance priorities along the food chain and tailor policy mechanisms and incentives at the local level to promote healthier nutrition through agricultural practice, including support for farmers to transition from alcohol to non-alcohol markets.

**Florence Berteletti**, Secretary General, Eurocare, talked about the health consequences of the promotion of alcohol products and transmitted calls from the health sector to reform to the CAP, F2F and heed reports of consumer preferences on labelling – that these be clear on nutrition and health information and on the bottle rather than online.

Discussions related to these presentations highlighted the following points:

- It is important to broaden the scope of research evidence and recognise the true value of consumables (foods and other table items like alcohol), including the more hidden costs across the value chain such as disease, environmental impact and socioeconomic elements such as fair wages.
- Promoting the concept 'drinking in moderation' has not been shown to have any public health value, given carcinogenic and neurotoxic risks from any amount of alcohol.
- In addition, it was pointed out that programmes promoting responsible drinking were also funding campaigns reaching some populations which are at risk from any drinking, such as young/underage people, adolescents, children, people in recovery and pregnant women

#### Breakout discussion

Participants were placed in small groups to discuss the question:

*What policy tools can EU Member States use in a comprehensive approach to protecting health through the alcohol production and marketing chain (3-5 pan-sectoral policy tools/options)*

#### Feedback / key issues from discussions

- Interdepartmental communication and exchange of perspectives between health, agriculture and finance (in the CAP, F2F and BECA, and also across different MS) continues to be an essential element to improve health-protecting regulation in the agricultural products promotion area.
- Impact assessment needs to include health, sustainability, employment and other social issues, while considering economic aspects (e.g. evidence on the economic impact of labelling).
- Transparency, attention to conflicts of interest and a multi-national scope of view is important.
- Shifts in policy impacting the supply side are urgently needed to incentivise the lowering of alcohol in products and reducing barriers to zero-alcohol production. In particular:
  - Taxation/pricing policy to increase the cost of alcohol
  - Remove alcohol from the list of those eligible for promotion funds as cultural products
- One sector which also needs attention in this area is education – alcohol production (wine and beer) is often used to illustrate different subjects in schools and mean that alcohol promotion reaches underage populations (even if accompanied by a 'drink responsibly' message)
- The increase in organic and ecological agriculture is very important, but, given the loose definition of 'sustainable', there is an emerging trend of 'greenwashing' of alcohol products - promoting eco credentials strongly to distract from health burden, and selective reporting (e.g., carbon over water footprint).
- There was a strong call to regulate labelling more comprehensively and enforce information disclosure – including the mandating of nutritional and health information on product labels (not online / via an app or platform), which is echoed by consumer preferences
- A general trend in the Commission away from empowering MS in the alcohol field was noted, whilst the WHO seems to be strengthening support for countries' activities with the SAFER guidance and proposal of ambassador countries.
- The mechanism to reinstate CNAPA or a similar expert group to work on strong alcohol policy and treat alcohol as a priority within the EC SGPP, requires a show of interest and push from various Member States, highlighting the importance of tackling alcohol consumption to reduce cancer, mental health problems and other health and social problems.

## Outcomes and lessons learned

Points made and discussions carried out in the workshop are summarised as 10 key concluding messages, which are each described in more detail below.

1. *Alcohol agricultural policy has an **impact on economies, the environment and health** but basic **underlying motives** (e.g., growth / reduction) may not be as divergent across sectors as they seem.*

The regulations that govern the growth of raw materials and agricultural processes to produce alcohol products clearly impact the costs involved, and therefore the immediate profit margins available to farmers and producers. These processes have a definable ecological impact, comprising the water and carbon footprints, as well as sequelae for biodiversity, pollution and the environment. For both the economic impact and environmental impact, it is important to take a wide perspective and full value chain approach, in order to fully understand the many facets involved, from farming raw materials to transporting and storing final products for sale.

Given the serious health impacts of any level of alcohol (ethanol) consumption, and the universal biological consequences on the human body, including the increased risk of cancer, the only viable movement for public health is the reduction of alcohol intake, both through decreased alcohol strength and decreased sales. The environmental impact would also be reduced through reduced alcohol production and sales.

However, carefully designed policy which includes the possibility of technological and practical support and incentives for farmers and producers transitioning to low or non-alcohol products, could serve to protect economic, environmental and health priorities simultaneously. These would have to be tailored to the local as well as national levels, to encourage uptake and transitioning to a more sustainable system.

2. *We need to strengthen **communication and collaborative structures** between health, agriculture, finance and other sectors; and for this communication and productive collaboration to be established, there is a need for **neutral settings** (at and national level).*

There is a current perceived impasse and lack of communication between policy makers in the sectors of health, agriculture, finance, environment and other sectors, when it comes to designing policy which changes practices regarding alcohol products. A strong conservative and protectionist lobby from the alcohol industry aims to preserve the current status quo of alcohol (particularly wine) as a key European trading item, and there is a certain distance between the agricultural sector which is concerned with these business interests, and the health, environment and social sectors, where the consequences of alcohol consumption are seen.

3. *The **ambiguous place of alcohol** (not a food but on the table) creates policy cracks and a lack of coherence, leading to information gaps and mixed messages for consumers*

Although alcohol cannot be defined as a food stuff due to its lack of nutritional value, it is still consumed within the diet. This creates a challenge for those working in public health, policy and nutrition as they must strike a balance between the cultural and traditional position of alcohol and the clear evidence that there is no safe level of consumption. Consumers receive confusing messages that seem to say both that alcohol should be avoided altogether and that there is a low-risk level of consumption. This is further exacerbated by messages coming directly from producers, or via research sponsored by the alcohol industry, which throws doubt on the health risks of alcohol consumption and in some cases even suggests that there are health benefits of consuming alcohol.

4. *Effort needs to be put into multi-sectoral systems to **incentivize and remove barriers for MS to lower the strength of alcohol products**, such as the maintenance of high alcohol levels in defined cultural products*

There are currently few policy measures which act as incentives for producers to lower the strength of alcohol products or remove barriers to this. For example, current criteria for defined cultural alcohol products include a specific alcohol strength of the product, meaning that producers looking to lower the alcohol content may risk losing a stamp of PDO or culturally recognised product, which is a clear disincentive. Collaboration with the PDO and PDI systems, to promote health through these labels by including or even favouring lower- alcohol products, could shift the incentive towards protecting health. MS could also explore ways to support producers further in switching to lower or zero-strength products in order to promote health, such as through market research and logistic support.

5. *Future areas to be addressed include (broad) **Health Impact Assessment** of agricultural policies, **Cost-benefit analysis** and consensus building around **communicating (cancer) risks***

Health impact assessment of agricultural policies could include the impact of alcohol on health, both in terms of the individual (e.g., NCDs and cancer) and environmental impacts along the value chain which affect health. Cost-benefit analysis could look at the impact of subsidies on consumption and its effect on health and productivity. There is clear evidence that alcohol causes cancer, MS need to develop clear and consistent messages for consumers about this risk, guided by coherent European recommendations.

6. *Conflicts of interests lead to **conflicting findings from different scientific groups** (e.g., the J-shaped curve) which stalls effective policy. Capacity on assessing evidence used for policy needs strengthening.*

The involvement of stakeholders with an economic interest in alcohol production and sale has promoted research which is outdated and/or not grounded in strong evidence or correct assumptions. Yet the manufacturing of doubt and ‘controversy’ in health sciences, also using media mechanisms to exaggerate conflicting views, also stalls policy decisions and can have negative health consequences. Multi-sectoral policy makers need better knowledge and clear guidance on how to find, assess the validity of and use evidence in policy making in order to base policy on the best-quality, strongest evidence available. This should start with an in-depth effort to increase transparency regarding funding and conflicts of interest around scientific evidence on harms caused by commercial products.

7. *The **environmental impact of alcohol products’ production, distribution, storage and consumption** needs to be assessed over the whole value chain, with comprehensive and transparent systems to report this, avoiding “greenwashing” (also on product labels).*

Current systems for recognising environmentally friendly production do not go far enough towards establishing criteria throughout the production chain and should be strengthened. While certain parts of alcohol production value chains may be carbon-neutral or even carbon-negative, a more comprehensive calculation of the impacts across different environmental criteria – carbon, water and biodiversity, for example – reveals a more worrying footprint for alcohol production.

Some alcohol brands are already using cherry-picked environmental points as marketing hooks for their products, and careful regulation needs to be developed and applied to prevent the hijacking of the environmental cause (greenwashing) to promote sales to the detriment of human and planetary health.

8. *There is public health support for **reducing or stopping funding for promotion activity by alcohol producers** (under discussion by the European Council), as with other products that harm health.*

Although there are economic and cultural arguments for subsidising the promotion of Member States' agricultural products, these must be balanced with health-related priorities. The use of EU funds for the promotion of alcohol undermines the commitments made by MS to protect and promote their citizens' health and to reduce alcohol-related harm, as outlined in various European level policies and strategies.

Bringing the rules for promotion funds in line with the beating cancer plan would logically lead to the exclusion of all carcinogenic products from these funding schemes, including alcohol.

9. The industry-supported terms '**drinking in moderation**' or '**responsible drinking**' have no scientific definition or public health value, and should be discouraged in promotion funding mechanisms.

There are no quantifiable limits for 'moderate' or 'responsible' drinking, these being industry-developed and promoted concepts with no basis in health science or research. Indeed, given the cancer risk and addictive nature of any and all alcohol in the human body, there is no 'safe' level of consumption, meaning that it is an anathema to talk of 'responsible' drinking, as it would be to talk of 'responsible' smoking.

Being vague and contradictory by definition, these terms only serve to confuse consumers by promoting conflicting messages, and should therefore not be incentivised through EU funding schemes for agricultural producers.

10. *Member States' health promoting action would be best supported by a deeper **alignment among the relevant EU programmes**: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) and Beating Cancer Plan (BECA).*

Aligning health and agricultural policy priorities and actions would better support consistent objectives for the European Union, both in terms of economic, and health and social outcomes.

Clear messages on how these can be aligned at the EU level would also support Member States in balancing the priorities inherent in policy making, while protecting citizens' health and consumers' rights.



## Annexes

## Annex 1: Workshop agenda

**Session 1 – Thurs 4<sup>th</sup> Nov – “Alcohol, no ordinary foodstuff” - Agricultural policy and alcohol production: the place of health in the equation**

Time (CET)	Topic (and format)	Chair/Speaker
13:50	Participants admitted to the meeting	Toni Gual (chair)
14:00	Introduction and briefing - Welcome from hosting Member State – Republic of Slovenia - Frame of the EU Farm2Fork initiative - Frame of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)	- Vesna Marinko (MoH, SI) - Claire Bury (DG SANTE) - João Onofre (DG AGRI)
14:20	- Evidence update – Sub-Topic 1: <b>Health in alcohol agricultural policy: priorities for the food system and regulating primary production</b>	Video presenters: - Laura Rossi (CREA, IT)
14:45	Stakeholder perspectives: Fleur Braddick (chair) - WHO Perspective: Tailoring agricultural policy mechanisms to tackle NCDs - The OECD perspective on EU alcohol agricultural policy and health - The CAP and Farm 2 Fork strategy – where is health?	Video presenters: - Joao Breda (WHO EU) - Michele Cecchini (OECD) - Nikolai Pushkarev (EPHA)
15:10	10-minute break	
15:20	Summary by sub-topic expert + introducing discussions (live)	F Braddick / L Rossi / J Breda
15:25	Breakout discussions – (small parallel groups of 8-10 people): ▪ Discussion question (TBC): How can EU Member States be supported to collaborate across sectors and reach balanced priorities for agricultural systems to reduce alcohol harm? (3-5 mechanisms)	Moderators and rapporteurs pre-assigned to each group
16:00	Feedback to whole group – Toni Gual (chair) - Brief summaries by rapporteurs/moderators + Round of comments	Rapporteurs and Moderators
16:30	Wrap up by hosts and sub-topic expert	A Gual / L Rossi / J Breda
16:45	End of afternoon 1	

**Session 2 – Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> Nov – “Farm 2 Glass – informing consumers” - Agricultural and promotion policy compatible with health and sustainability**

Time (CET)	Topic (and format)	Chair/Speaker
13:50	Participants admitted to the meeting (instructions slide on screen)	Fleur Braddick (chair)
14:00	Introduction and briefing - Welcome from hosting Member State - Slovenia - Frame of the Agrifood Promotion Policy (Regulation 1144/2014)	- Ada Hocevar Grom (NIJZ, SI) - Christina Gerstgrasser (DG AGRI)
14:20	- Evidence update – Sub-Topic 2: <b>Key scientific messages on agricultural policy impacting the promotion of alcohol products, including labelling.</b>	Toni Gual (chair) Presenter: - Laura Rossi (CREA, IT)
14:45	Stakeholder perspectives: - Food systems which account for multiple priorities: implications of environmental findings for alcohol - WHO Perspective: Agriculture promotion mechanisms - balancing priorities along the food chain - Health consequences of promotion of alcohol products – reforms to the CAP, F2F and consumer preferences	Video presenters: - Katherine Severi (IAS, UK) - Joao Breda (WHO) - Florence Berteletti (Eurocare)
15:10	10-minute break	
15:20	Summary by sub-topic expert + introducing discussions (live)	F Braddick / L Rossi / J Breda
15:25	Breakout discussions – (small parallel groups of 8-10 discussants): ▪ Discussion question: What policy tools can EU Member States use in a comprehensive approach to protecting health through the alcohol production and marketing chain (3-5 pan-sectoral policy tools/options)	Moderators and rapporteurs pre-assigned to each group.
16:00	Feedback to whole group – Toni Gual (chair) - Brief summaries by rapporteurs/moderators + Round of comments	Rapporteurs and Moderators
16:30	Wrap up by hosts and topic experts	A Gual / L Rossi / J Breda
16:45	End of afternoon 2	

**Annex 2: Participation by session, country, and sector**

## Attendance by session

Post-workshop attendance statistics	S1	S2
	4th November	9th November
Speakers	8	6
<i>Recorded only</i>	4	0
Attendees	46	35
Organisers (including Chairs)	7	7
<i>DEEP SEAS/FAR SEAS</i>	5	5
<i>External (cEvents)</i>	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>48</b>

## Number of sessions attended

Recorded input only	4
S1 only	21
S2 only	10
S1+S2	25
<i>Total sessions attended (excluding organisers)</i>	<i>56</i>

## Attendance by country/region represented

<b>EU27</b>	<b>Attended</b>	<b>Candidate countries</b>	<b>Attended</b>	<b>European Neighbourhood Policy</b>	<b>Attended</b>
Austria	1	Albania		Algeria	
Belgium	4	Montenegro		Armenia	
Bulgaria	1	North Macedonia		Azerbaijan	
Croatia		Serbia		Belarus	
Cyprus		Turkey		Egypt	
Czechia	2	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	Georgia	
Denmark				Israel	
Estonia	1	<b>Potential candidates</b>	<b>Attended</b>	Jordan	
Finland		Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	Lebanon	
France		Kosovo		Lybia	
Germany	2	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	Moldova	
Greece				Morocco	
Hungary		<b>Other European countries</b>	<b>Attended</b>	Palestine	
Ireland	1	Andorra		Syria	
Italy	7	Iceland	1	Tunisia	
Latvia	2	Liechtenstein		Ukraine	1
Lithuania	2	Monaco		<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>
Luxembourg		Norway			
Malta		Russia	2	<b>Other intl. countries</b>	<b>Attended</b>
Netherlands	1	San Marino		Chile	1
Poland		Switzerland		India	1
Portugal	3	United Kingdom	3	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>
Romania		Vatican City			
Slovakia		<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Rep. Intl. Organisations</b>	<b>Attended</b>
Slovenia	3			European area (e.g., EC + WHO-EU)	6
Spain	5			International area (e.g., WHO, OECD)	2
Sweden	3			<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>				
				<b>Total participants</b>	<b>56</b>

## Attendance by sector

Primary Sector	Attended		
Public health agency/authority - EU Commission	4		
Public administration agency/authority (not health) - EU Commission	3		
Public health agency/authority - International experts	1		
Public health agency/authority - WHO	1		
Public health agency/authority - National	15		
Public administration agency/authority (not health) - National	4		
Public health agency/authority - Local-regional	3	<b>Health</b>	<b>Non-health</b>
<b>Public administration total</b>	<b>31</b>	24	7
Academia-higher education (European)	0		
Academia-higher education (international)	0		
Academia-higher education (national)	1		
Academia-higher education (national) - non-health	0		
Academia-higher education (regional/local)	0		
Academia-research (European)	3		
Academia-research (European) - non-health	0		
Academia-research (international)	0		
Academia-research (national)	2	<b>Health</b>	<b>Non-health</b>
<b>Academia Total</b>	<b>6</b>	6	0
Civil society - capacity building and advocacy (European)	0		
Civil society - capacity building and advocacy (international)	0		
Civil society - capacity building and advocacy (national)	0		
Civil society - NGO (European)	4		
Civil society - NGO (international)	2		
Civil society - NGO (national)	3	<b>Health</b>	<b>Non-health</b>
<b>Civil Society Total</b>	<b>9</b>	9	0
Healthcare - research (international)	0		
Healthcare - clinical practice (national)	1		
Healthcare - research (national)	9		
Healthcare - research (Local-municipal)	0		
Healthcare - research (Local-regional)	0	<b>Health</b>	<b>Non-health</b>
<b>Healthcare Total</b>	<b>10</b>	10	0
<b>TOTAL excluding organisers</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>7</b>

**Annex 3: Quantitative results of workshop evaluation**

	<b>Overall evaluation</b> (1=terrible → 10=excellent)	<b>Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following items:</b> (1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral, 5=strongly agree)		
	<b>On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the session overall?</b>	<b>The topics and aspects covered by the speakers were relevant for the overarching theme of the session.</b>	<b>I learned actionable information for my work and/ or consolidated my understanding/ knowledge.</b>	<b>There was enough time and opportunities for interaction with the speakers and between participants.</b>
<b>Average score: Session 1 n=20</b>	8.1	4.3	4.0	3.7
<b>Average score: Session 2 n=12</b>	8.6	4.6	3.8	4.3

