

# A Structured, Collaborative and Open Access Database of Food Policies in Europe: Introducing EU F-POD

Une base de données structurée, collaborative et en libre accès sur les politiques alimentaires en Europe : présentation de la base de l'Union européenne F-POD

Eine strukturierte, kooperative und frei zugängliche Datenbank zur Lebensmittelpolitik in Europa: Einführung von EU F-POD

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## Introduction

The European food system faces numerous challenges that threaten its stability and sustainability. Ensuring universal access to safe food is a main challenge, since ongoing outbreaks of bacterial diseases compromise food quality and safety. Despite improvements in living standards, food poverty remains a significant issue for certain demographics, exacerbating income inequality and disparities in access to food. Furthermore, as of 2019, the prevalence of overweight and obesity affects nearly 53 per cent of the European population increasing the risk of chronic and diet-related diseases. Technological advancements hold promise for boosting productivity and efficiency in food production but also introduce challenges linked to global market dynamics, geopolitical tensions and price volatility (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2022).

Environmental concerns are intensifying, with climate change having varied impacts on agriculture across Northern and Southern Europe. Climate change is affecting agricultural productivity and water availability, and extreme weather events disrupt food production and supply chains (The Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change, 2022). Additionally, agricultural practices and intensive farming contribute to biodiversity loss, and resource scarcity challenges sustainable food production. The issue of food waste is also significant, with a staggering amount of food wasted annually in the EU.

“ La base F-POD de l'Union européenne rassemble et classe les politiques en termes d'objectifs (et sous-objectifs), de cibles principales, de bénéficiaires finaux et d'instruments. ”

Over the last two decades, European governments have developed a stronger commitment to address these challenges, with a rapidly growing number of policy interventions. These interventions have had mixed results, and the scientific community is intensifying efforts to provide a solid evidence base and more effective food policies.

In this context, a comprehensive mapping of food policies represents an invaluable source of information, which would allow us to identify critical areas where both national governments and European institutions must act to attain health, environmental, economic and social policy objectives, especially in terms of FOOD 2030 priorities and challenges (United Nations, 2015). A mapping enables us to identify blind spots in terms of existing food policies, as well as specific areas of greater advancement and development. However, this task is intricate due to the large heterogeneity induced by varying levels of policy implementation (local, regional, national, EU), the evolving nature of priorities over time, and, sometimes, the lack of explicit or univocal objectives. This adds to the lack of a recognised standard classification that would serve a systematic collection.

In this spirit, we present the outcome of an extensive academic effort aimed at outlining current EU and national policies influencing the food system in Europe. This effort has resulted in the production of a structured online database, which was named European Food Policy Database (EU F-POD).<sup>1</sup> Its objective extends

beyond a simple list of food policies, but rather it offers a structured classification based on policy goals, targets and instruments with the aim of facilitating the analysis, helping in identifying gaps and priorities, and fostering discussions among policy actors and analysts.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to assemble an open access database encompassing information on policy measures across the whole spectrum of food policy goals, though excellent examples of more focused, thematic databases exist. For example, nutrition policies and programmes are mapped within the NOURISHING and WHO databases (World Cancer Research Fund International, 2024; World Health Organization, 2024), and a comprehensive legal database on primary and secondary legislation of the European Union is provided by the EUR-Lex website.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the key contributions of EU F-POD are (i) going beyond the specificity of the currently available datasets; (ii) consolidating scattered information from mixed sources of food-related policies in a unique database; and (iii) providing a general framework for the classification of policy measures.

The EU F-POD database has several features. First, it is comprehensive in scope as we ensured that at least some food policies are included for all objectives, targets and instruments considered in our framework. Moreover, it has a defined structure, based on the taxonomy of food policies from the classification of policy goals proposed within the European project SUSFANS (Rutten *et al.*, 2018) and revisited in the Fit4Food project (Biondi *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, alternative classification dimensions concerning the adopted policy instruments, as well as the primary targets and ultimate beneficiaries, are provided in order to be able to browse by type of measure and to have readily available information on economic and social actors involved. Lastly, the database is flexible and dynamic, meaning that it can be expanded with additional policy measures, as well as additional

classification variables tailored to specific needs.

**“ Der EU F-POD sammelt und klassifiziert Politiken nach Zielen (und Unterzielen), Begünstigten und Instrumenten. ”**

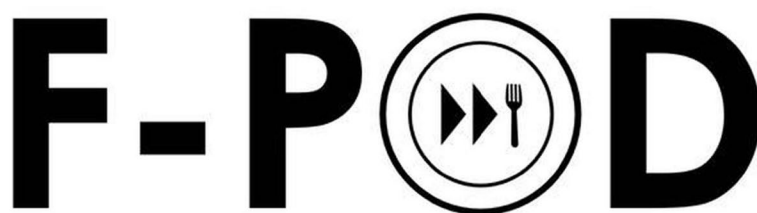
An initial mapping and design of the database were outlined in the Fit4Food project (Biondi *et al.*, 2019), and its expansion has been provided within the ONFOODS project.<sup>3</sup> In its current version, EU F-POD includes 621 policies (as of 10 October 2024), 61 per cent have been implemented at the Member State level, while the remaining 39 per cent are European-level policies. We note that EU F-POD, while being comprehensive in scope, is currently not exhaustive, given the complexity and rapid evolution of policy frameworks. For instance, policies lacking online documentation or documentation not available in English are likely to be overlooked by

our search strategy. However, as explained later, EU F-POD is built as an open access and collaborative effort, which opens the way to updating and integration by contributors across Europe, while ensuring the appropriate quality checks.

This paper describes the EU F-POD database, its concepts definitions and selection criteria, the data collection and search strategy, as well as its structure and classifications. Lastly, some extraction examples are provided together with concluding remarks and future directions.

### EU F-POD: structure, concepts, definitions and classification framework

This section describes EU F-POD design and structure, as well as the processes through which policies are collected and displayed based on the definitions and selection criteria adopted. The target audience for our database includes not only potential data users, but also individuals considering developing supplementary measures or data



### Moving forward with evidence-based food policies

**EU F-POD Logo and Word Cloud: A visual representation of key themes.**

collection projects for food policy issues.

**Concepts, definitions and selection criteria.** For definition of policy, we adopted the one by Cochran and Malone (2005), which states that a public policy refers to any action taken by government or public agencies that convert competing private objectives into public commitments and also encompasses decisions not to take action. Such purposeful decisions are made by authoritative actors in a political system who have the formal responsibility for making binding choices among societal goals. These forms of government control are usually expressed in a law, a regulation or an order. Since they reflect an intent of government, they are backed by an authorised reward,

incentive or penalty. More specifically, the policies collected in the database include any government action that can affect the food system and concern production and its inputs, packaging, processing, trade, retail and consumption, and waste disposal. The current set of food policies includes the so-called Food and Nutrition Security - Research and Innovation (R&I) policies that represent any action that funds, stimulates or directs research to promote innovation for food systems. It is worth emphasising that the mapping has considered not only policies targeting actors within the food system, but also those actors who, even if not directly involved in the food system, can influence food availability and consumption or other related matters, for example advertising bans targeting

broadcasters, or research programmes aimed at the broader scientific community.

**Data collection and search strategy.** Different sources have been adopted in our data collection and search strategy. An initial set of policies has been collected from the aforementioned NOURISHING database, a framework of food policies used to promote healthy diets (Hawkes *et al.*, 2013). The search has also been extended to official websites of the EU Member States that can promote and implement country-level food policies. Other official sources have been reviewed – such as scientific literature, online news websites, websites of public and private associations. Collaboration and exchange of information with the SCAR FS SWG has enabled the inclusion of information from a qualitative mapping performed on Member States, covering the major trends and ambitions, improvements needed and gaps in food-related R&I (De Ruyck *et al.*, 2018). This mapping activity involved the collection of questionnaires from twenty EU Member States, aimed at gaining information on national and regional food and R&I policies or strategies and funding programmes that are relevant to ensuring food and nutrition security. Additional evidence has been found on the EUR-Lex website to collect policies covering topics relevant for agriculture and rural development, fisheries, environment, climate change and food safety and in the Member States' government websites, focusing on agriculture, health and economic ministries. Scientific literature available on online databases (e.g. Google scholar, Web of Science, Scopus) has been used to fill the gaps and is cited in the database for further information about



A little tomato plant © Foto di Francesco Vitale.

Nourishing	SCAR	Others	Total
173	156	237	566
31%	27%	42%	100%

**Table 2: Classification of policy goals and sub-goals adopted in the EU F-POD mapping of food policies, adapted from the SUSFANS conceptual framework**

Goals	Balanced and sufficient diets for all EU citizens	Food safety	Reduced environmental impact	Viable and socially balanced EU agri-food business	Equitable outcomes and conditions	+ A cross-sectional R&I-oriented goal
Sub-Goals	Reduced economic and social burden of diet-related diseases Food security	Reduced economic and social burden of food-borne diseases	Animal welfare Biodiversity Climate Plant health Resource efficiency and waste management Water and soil management Multiple subgoals	Competitiveness Market regulation (e.g. prices, VAT, marketing rules)	Equity and social cohesion in the EU Aid and cooperation Global Food and Nutrition Security	

policies. A summary of the number of policies collected in EU F-POD classified according to the main sources can be found in [Table 1](#).

Policies have been collected from publicly available sources, such as official guidelines, broad strategies, and action plans. EU F-POD also includes weblinks as references, so that included information can be checked and substantiated. Whenever possible, references to shared

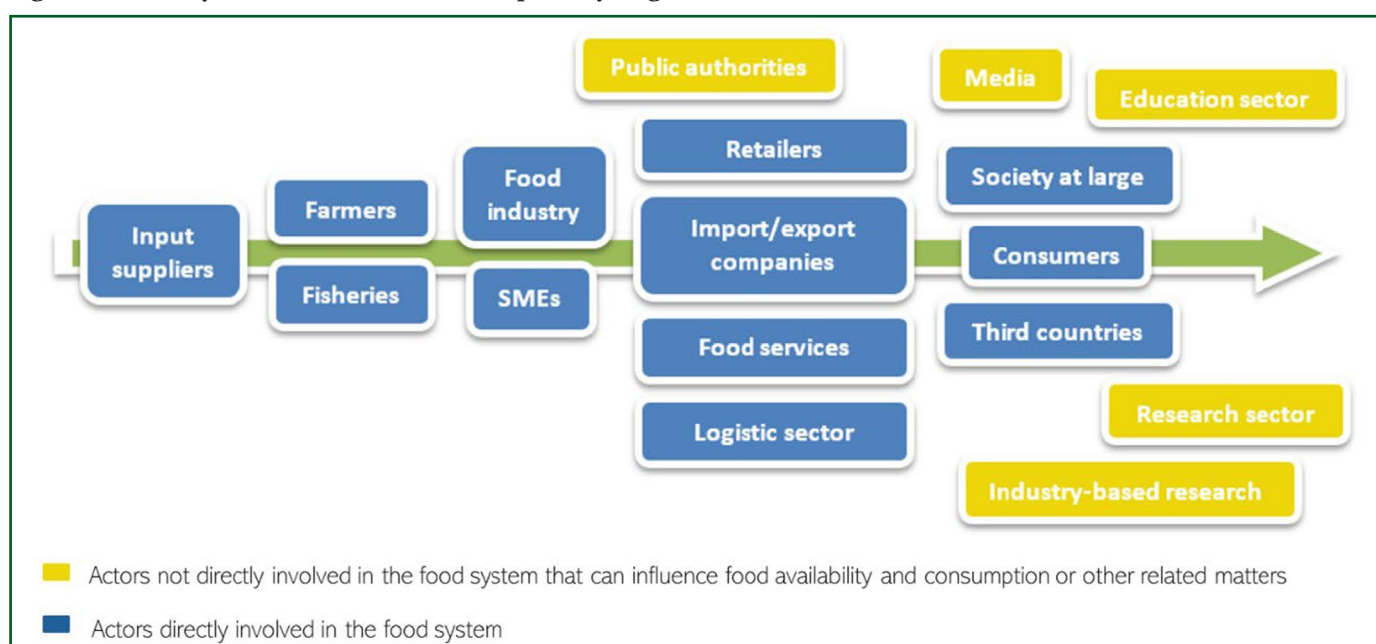
documents and /or scientific publications containing additional information on the policy are provided in their English version. Some exceptions remain for documents published in the national original language and not translated into English.

**Structure and classifications.**

The EU F-POD collects and classifies policies in terms of goals (and sub-goals), primary targets, ultimate

beneficiaries and instruments. Policy goals are high order statements describing the fundamental outcomes that a policy aims to achieve through its activities. The adopted goals and subgoals of a policy are classified according to SUSFANS conceptual framework (Rutten *et al.*, 2018), slightly adjusted to reflect the desired outcomes expressed in EU or national policies. SUSFANS (Metrics, Models and Foresight for European

**Figure 1: Food system actors considered as primary targets and/or ultimate beneficiaries in the EU F-POD database**



Source: Biondi *et al.* (2019).

SUSustainable Food And Nutrition Security) was a H2020 multidisciplinary research programme aimed at building the conceptual framework, the evidence-based and analytical tools for underpinning EU-wide food policies.

The EU F-POD policy goals cover a broad variety of objectives relative to the entire food system, from nutritional to environmental and agri-food business outcomes. An adjustment with respect to the

SUSFANS framework is the introduction of an additional goal related to R&I. This horizontal R&I oriented goal refers to policies responding to a variety of objectives, rather than a specific one. Each goal is broken down into sub-goals to provide a more granular classification of policies. For instance, the reduction of environmental impact includes multiple sub-goals that split the environmental dimension into several sub-dimensions, i.e. animal welfare, biodiversity, climate, plant health, resource efficiency, water and waste.

The full set of sub-goals for each policy goal is outlined in [Table 2](#).

EU F-POD also reports primary targets and ultimate beneficiaries in the classification of food policies. The former refer to the immediate societal group towards which the policy action is directed or targeted. The latter refers to the societal group that is intended to be the actual beneficiary in terms of expected benefits. For instance, a ban on trans-fats has a direct and immediate effect on manufacturing

**Table 3: Classification and definition of policy instruments included in EU F-POD, with examples**

Regulation and self-regulation	Quality, safety or nutrition laws concerning the production and processing of food products; advertising restrictions and bans; sale restrictions; food marketing rules; regulation on health, nutrition and safety claims; GMO regulations; etc.
Fiscal policies	Taxes or subsidies applied to certain categories of food and drink ingredients; subsidies for farmers to grow certain crops; return systems to reduce packaging waste; financial support for withdrawals of food products; tax exemptions; etc.
Income support measures	Income-based or other conditional food vouchers or cash transfers targeting, for instance, farmers or low-income consumers, with the aim of improving their purchasing power and access to food products and/or agricultural inputs, equipment and machineries, thus helping to tackle disparities;
Border measures	Import and export licences, tariffs and quotas for certain food products; animal and animal-derived products transit rules; veterinary certifications for imports; etc.
Food and agricultural standards	Voluntary or mandatory, setting rules on content (ingredients) and composition of foods; use of food additives, supplement and improvement agents.
Labelling measures	Setting the type and extent of information about a product, its container or packaging that must be imparted by a label.
Information measures	Social marketing; awareness campaigns; recommendations; dedicated informative websites; knowledge transfer programmes; guidelines; etc.
Education measures	Educational programmes on European agriculture, healthy eating addressed to pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary school students; the inclusion of food-related curricula or classes in schools; training addressing food services personnel and staff; tailor-made advice for farmers and fishermen; etc.
Delivery of services	Support for the internationalisation of EU agri-food businesses; common catalogues for agricultural product varieties; networks and databases to connect multiple public and private bodies; etc.
Procurement	Government food purchases, generally for food assistance, hospitals, schools, nursing homes, prisons, the military, etc: they are often part of public food procurement strategies to boost rural economies, promote agricultural development, encourage the development of SMEs, improve food security and nutrition, and support the achievement of social, environmental and economic objectives by linking public food purchases to domestic food production.
SME-targeted support	Guarantee funds for SMEs to promote access to funding sources; measures to regulate aid to SMEs; etc.
R&I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic instruments (i.e. R&amp;D grants and loans, tax incentives, state equity assistance, subsidies, feed-in tariffs, trading systems, deposit-refund-systems, public procurement, export credit guarantees, infrastructure provision, cooperative R&amp;D grants).</li> <li>• Regulation (i.e. patent law, intellectual property rights, technology/performance standards, prohibition of products/practices, application constraints, market design, grid access guarantee, priority feed-in, environmental liability law).</li> <li>• Information (i.e. professional training and qualification, entrepreneurship training, scientific workshops, training on new technologies, rating and labelling programmes, public information campaigns, education system, thematic meetings, public debates, cooperative R&amp;D programmes, clusters).</li> </ul>

companies which are required to comply with the standard (primary target) but is ultimately intended to promote healthier food consumption among consumers, who thus represent the final beneficiaries.

“ The EU F-POD collects and classifies policies in terms of goals (and sub-goals), primary targets, ultimate beneficiaries and instruments. ”

Figure 1 displays the full set of actors considered in the EU F-POD classification framework either as potential primary targets or ultimate beneficiaries. We make a distinction between policies addressing citizens targeted in their act of consuming food (e.g. promoting a healthier diet), which we classify as *consumers*, and the broader category defined as *society at large*. This latter category considers policies whose ultimate benefits are not necessarily associated

with food consumption (e.g. reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural production or supporting biodiversity). As one would expect, consumers and society at large are the most frequent beneficiaries of policies in the database (80 per cent). In terms of primary targets, most of the selected policies act through the food industry (32 per cent) and farmers (19 per cent). There is a growing number of policies acting through school food services and the education sector.

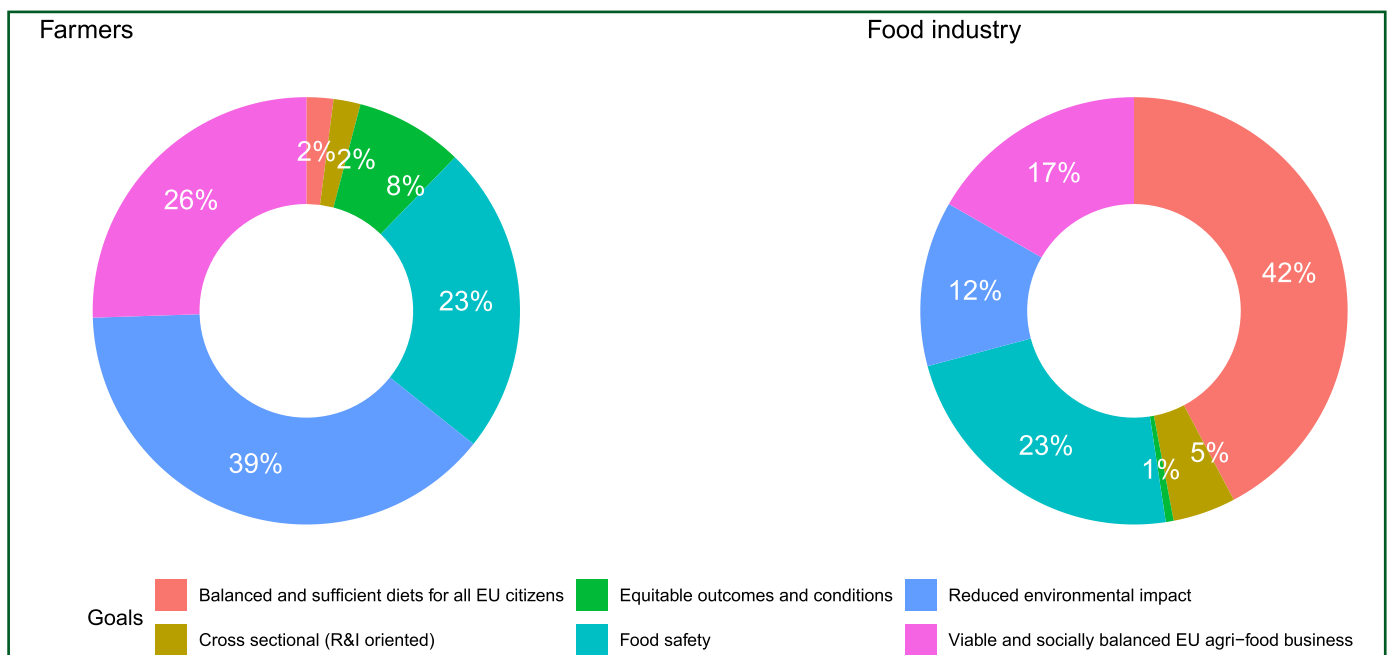
Policy instruments are the specific techniques or means through which public actors (e.g. national and EU government bodies, public agencies, etc.) pursue their goals. The policy instruments considered for the food policy classification within the EU F-POD database are listed and described in Table 3. They include a broad variety of measures, from fiscal, border, income-related to education, information and procurement, standards and delivery of services. Drawing from the definition of Rogge and Reichardt (2016), the classification of R&I policies has been broken down into three broad dimensions: regulations (e.g. regulation on

intellectual property rights and patenting, technology standards, banning practices), economic instruments (e.g. fiscal measures, research funds) and information instruments (e.g. funding trainings/ education measures, scientific workshops).

The majority of policies in the database are codified as regulations and self-regulation (38 per cent), followed by R&I economics instruments (13 per cent), information measures and food and agricultural standards (both 8 per cent). While regulations and agricultural standards are primarily directed towards food industries, information measures are the privileged instrument to target consumers. R&I policies are mostly directed to the research and innovation sector within the food industry.

The database provides a title, a description and a selection of keywords for each food policy. These details allow smart searches on keywords and text through the EU F-POD website. The key formulator of the policy and the source from which the policy information has been retrieved are also provided. The information on

Figure 2: Distribution of policy goals across policies addressed to farmers and the food industry as primary targets

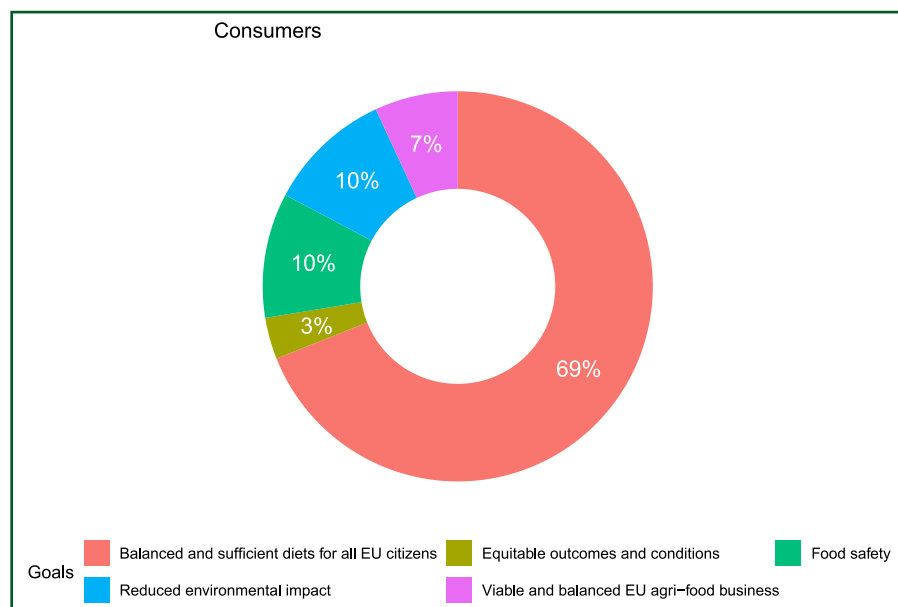


the geographical scope of each policy allows a distinction to be made between EU-level and national-level policies, and the specific country (or countries) of implementation are explicitly listed. In addition, the database includes details on the time window covered by each policy, indicating the initial year of implementation and the final year for those policies that have been discontinued. Finally, reference web-links and scientific publications are made available to access detailed background information. The full set of metadata and variables in the EU F-POD database are listed and explained in full detail in Table A1 in the Appendix which can be found at <https://site.unibo.it/foodpolicy/en/database>.

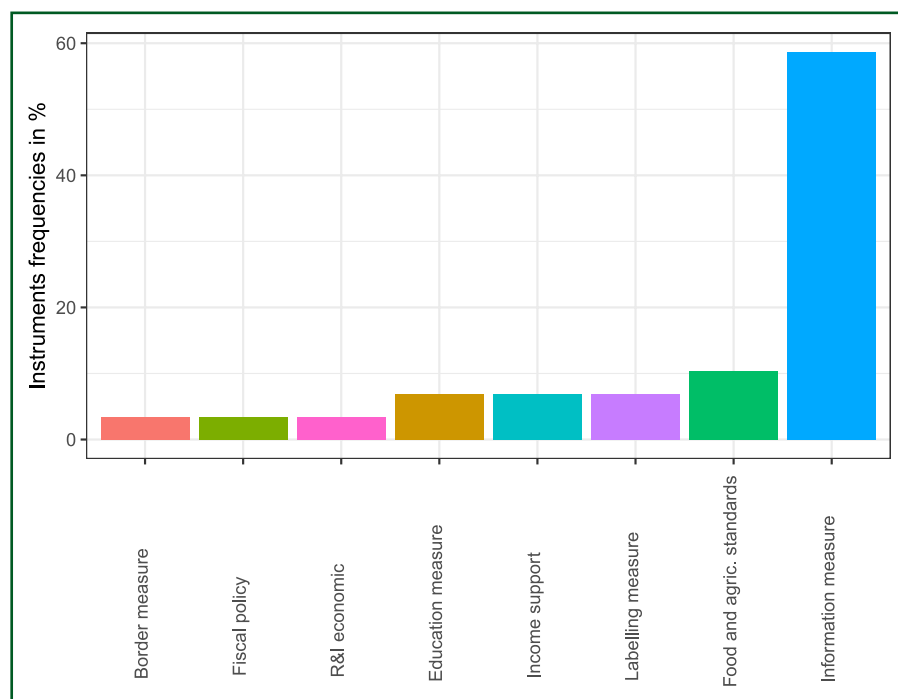
### Extraction examples

Policies acting primarily through farmers and/or the food industry encompass 47 per cent of the entire dataset, which highlights the relevance of these actors in pursuing food policy goals. A breakdown of these policies reveals differences in the relative composition of goals, as illustrated in Figure 2. Policies targeting farmers mainly aim at mitigating the environmental impact of food production, particularly in relation to climate and animal welfare regulations (main sub-goals). On the other hand, policies targeting the food industry predominantly focus on ensuring balanced and sufficient diets for all EU citizens, thereby reducing the economic and social burden of diet-related diseases. A significant portion of the latter group pertains to regulations governing food and agricultural standards for food safety, nutrition laws concerning food processing and composition, and provisions on the use of nutrition claims in the marketing of food products. Notably, regulations concerning food safety and the enhancement of the balanced landscape in the EU agri-food sector, mostly in terms of competitiveness, constitute a

**Figure 3a: Distribution of policy goals for policies aimed at consumers**



**Figure 3b: Distribution of instruments used in policies aimed at consumers**



substantial portion of both policy groups.

An additional example of a potential extraction from the EU F-POD database is provided in Figures 3a and 3b, which focus on policies primarily targeting consumers. Figure 3a displays the distribution of policy goals, while Figure 3b shows the proportion of instruments used in these policies. Most consumer-targeted policies aim at ensuring balanced and sufficient diets for all EU citizens

(69 per cent) and information measures are the most common instrument (60 per cent), which includes social marketing initiatives, awareness campaigns, the publication of recommendations or guidelines, dedicated informative websites and knowledge transfer programmes.

### Conclusions and future directions

The EU F-POD database is a practical tool for reporting and categorising

policies based on various criteria. It facilitates comparative policy analysis within and across countries at both the European and national levels, aiding in the identification of gaps in policy actions and potential alternative options from other countries.

A European food policy database that covers various types of policy and gathers information from multiple countries and languages requires significant costs and efforts of construction and maintenance. This is likely a key reason for the lack of such a resource until now. To address this gap, we focused our efforts on developing an open-access tool that can be maintained through a collective effort involving researchers and policy experts.

The University of Bologna has provided the IT resources to make the EU F-POD database available as a searchable online tool through the EU Food Policy Portal.<sup>4</sup> Through this portal, users can access information

on the structure, specific definitions, and theoretical framework behind the database. The portal provides direct access to the database search interface, empowering users to personalise their searches depending on specific study needs. Furthermore, users can provide policy-specific feedback to refine, complete and enrich the available data. Recognising the dynamic nature of policies, users are encouraged to regularly consult the project website for the latest updates.

In terms of future directions, we will especially invest in efforts to foster collaborative activities and widen the outreach of the EU F-POD database. There is a concerted plan towards elevating promotional efforts to a European scale, leveraging various communication platforms and engagement strategies to enhance visibility and accessibility. Simultaneously, there is a strategic vision to establish an international scientific committee, drawing upon expertise and insights from diverse

stakeholders across geographical boundaries. This committee will serve as a catalyst for collaboration, bringing together scholars, policymakers and practitioners who share a common commitment to advancing food policy research and implementation. By utilising collective expertise and insights, the database will evolve dynamically, ensuring its relevance and comprehensiveness in addressing global food policy challenges.

Moreover, promotional initiatives will extend beyond traditional avenues, tapping into innovative channels and partnerships to broaden reach and engagement. These efforts will involve participation in international conferences and events, and the utilisation of digital platforms to disseminate information and foster dialogue. By embracing collaborative efforts and diverse promotion channels, we hope that the EU F-POD database will become a key tool for informing food policy decisions, both locally and globally.



**An Italian grandmother cooking with passion and care © Francesca Manente.**



## Notes

- 1 Available at: <https://ricercatm.unibo.it/FoodPolicyDatabase/index.aspx>
- 2 Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>
- 3 Available at: <https://onfoods.it/>
- 4 Available at: <https://site.unibo.it/foodpolicy/en>

## Appendix

To access additional material please go to: <https://site.unibo.it/foodpolicy/en/database>

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# Summary


## A Structured, Collaborative and Open Access Database of Food Policies in Europe: Introducing EU F-POD

 This paper presents a new, open-access database of food policies, the European Food Policy Database (EU F-POD). It is a comprehensive and collaborative on-line resource, and goes beyond a mere list of food policies by offering a structured collection of food policies classified by goals, targets, and instruments, drawing from existing and validated taxonomies. It consists of an organized and cohesive body of national and international laws, regulations, and provisions related to the food area, to facilitate consultation, interpretation and policy analysis. More specifically, it may help identify normative gaps, contradictions or overlaps between existing rules, and regulatory differences between states, fostering discussions among various multi-sectoral actors. The EU F-POD database is comprehensive in scope, ensuring the inclusion of policies for all objectives, targets, and instruments within its framework. We describe the EU F-POD database, its structure, definition, and data collection strategy, including also some extraction examples to demonstrate the potential of such a tool to users. EU F-POD was designed as an open access tool, so that a supervised, collaborative effort among researchers and experts can guarantee its future sustainability and updating.

## Une base de données structurée, collaborative et en libre accès sur les politiques alimentaires en Europe : présentation de la base de l'Union européenne F-POD

 Cet article présente une nouvelle base de données en libre accès sur les politiques alimentaires: la base de données sur les politiques alimentaires européennes (F-POD). Il s'agit d'une ressource en ligne complète et collaborative qui va au-delà d'une simple liste de politiques alimentaires en proposant un ensemble structuré de politiques classées par objectifs, cibles et instruments, en s'appuyant sur des taxonomies existantes et validées. Cette base de données consiste en un ensemble organisé et cohérent de lois, réglementations et dispositions nationales et internationales liées au domaine alimentaire, visant à faciliter la consultation, l'interprétation et l'analyse des politiques. Plus précisément, elle peut aider à identifier les lacunes normatives, les contradictions ou les chevauchements entre les règles existantes et les différences réglementaires entre les États, favorisant ainsi les discussions entre divers acteurs multisectoriels. La base de données F-POD de l'Union européenne (EU) a une portée complète, garantissant l'inclusion de politiques pour tous les objectifs, cibles et instruments relevant de son cadre. Nous décrivons la base de données F-POD, sa structure, sa définition et sa stratégie de collecte de données, y compris également quelques exemples d'extractions pour démontrer le potentiel d'un tel outil aux utilisateurs. La base F-POD de l'UE a été conçu comme un outil en libre accès afin qu'un effort collaboratif supervisé entre chercheurs et experts puisse garantir sa durabilité et sa mise à jour dans l'avenir.

## Eine strukturierte, kooperative und frei zugängliche Datenbank zur Lebensmittelpolitik in Europa: Einführung von EU F-POD

 Dieses Papier stellt eine neue, frei zugängliche Datenbank zur Lebensmittelpolitik vor, die European Food Policy Database (EU F-POD). Es handelt sich dabei um eine umfassende und gemeinschaftliche Online-Plattform, die über eine bloße Auflistung ernährungspolitischer Maßnahmen hinausgeht: Sie bietet eine strukturierte Sammlung von Maßnahmen, die nach Zielen, Vorgaben und Instrumenten geordnet sind und auf bestehenden und validierten Taxonomien basieren. Sie besteht aus einer systematischen und kohärenten Darstellung von nationalen und internationalen Gesetzen, Verordnungen und Vorschriften, die für den Lebensmittelsektor relevant sind und kann Konsultationen, Interpretationen und politische Analysen erleichtern. Insbesondere kann sie helfen, normative Lücken, Widersprüche oder Überschneidungen zwischen bestehenden Regelungen aufzuzeigen und regulatorische Unterschiede zwischen den Staaten zu identifizieren. Darüber hinaus kann sie Diskussionen zwischen verschiedenen multisektoralen Akteuren fördern. Die EU F-POD-Datenbank ist umfassend und stellt sicher, dass politische Maßnahmen für alle Ziele, Vorgaben und Instrumente in ihrem Rahmen erfasst werden. Wir beschreiben die EU F-POD-Datenbank, ihre Struktur, Definition und Datenerfassungsstrategie, einschließlich einiger Extraktionsbeispiele, um den Nutzern und das Potenzial eines solchen Instruments zu demonstrieren. EU F-POD wurde als Open-Access-Instrument konzipiert, so dass die Nachhaltigkeit und zukünftige Aktualisierung durch eine kontrollierte, gemeinschaftliche Anstrengung von Forschern und Experten seine zukünftige Nachhaltigkeit und Aktualisierung gewährleistet werden kann.

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