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**NOTE**

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From:	Presidency
To:	Council
Subject:	The challenges agriculture is facing with climate change and the transition to more sustainable food systems

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Delegations will find in the Annex a background paper prepared by the Presidency with a view to the lunch discussion at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 19 July 2021.

**AGRI/FISH Council – 19 July 2021****Lunch discussion with US Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack**

**Theme – the challenges agriculture is facing with climate change and the transition to more sustainable food systems**

**Climate change**

Agriculture is both highly exposed to, and significantly contributes to climate change through the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Promoting innovative climate-friendly farming practices, including through digital technologies, can substantially reduce the climate footprint of the agriculture sector while maintaining productivity and ensuring food security. Reducing the current levels of food losses and food waste is also key to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, a goal common to the EU and the US. Sharing this ambition among different international partners is critical to its success, in particular with a view to avoiding carbon leakage and ensuring a level playing field for farmers.

Recent extreme weather events highlight the risks associated with climate change and their impact on agriculture and food systems. Despite certain positive effects in some regions (e.g. a longer growing season), the overall impact of changing weather patterns on agriculture is projected to be negative. Adapting farming practices and production patterns will be key to building resilience to climate change and to maintaining agricultural viability in the future.

**Sustainable food systems**

The EU and the US share a commitment to the sustainability and resilience of our food systems, so as to ensure our lasting capacity to provide sufficient safe, nutritious, healthy and affordable food for all within our planetary boundaries. Working closely together in multilateral fora and international standard-setting bodies is key to achieving this. The upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit will be a landmark opportunity to jointly address the common challenges we are facing across the agri-food chain and to set the future direction.

Developing sustainable and resilient food systems is a key priority for the EU, which is reflected in the EU's new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), with a significant increase in the share of funding dedicated to measures to promote sustainability. In particular, a number of environmental standards will allow the effective protection of natural resources such as water and soil, in line with relevant EU legislation. Enhancing the sustainability of food systems is also a key priority in the context of the 'European Green Deal' (the blueprint for the EU's environmental and climate actions) and is taken forward by, in particular, the EU's 'Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system'.

Trade also has a significant role to play in achieving ambitious sustainability objectives in relation to agriculture and food systems, in particular in key areas such as the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity, combating deforestation, improving animal welfare, and preventing the further spread of antimicrobial resistance. Additionally, the contribution of regional and local trade, including through short supply chains and better access to regional and local markets. Given the importance of our markets in international trade, we should engage proactively and use our joint leverage to increase the level of ambition on sustainability objectives in the context of international trade rules. EU-US collaboration on transparency is a good start in this regard.

The sustainability of food systems has to be further improved through promoting responsible investments and stepping up research and innovation, including in key sectors such as the circular bioeconomy and the blue economy while at the same time promoting sustainable consumption patterns. Support measures under the new CAP and other EU programmes - in particular 'Horizon Europe' - can make a strong contribution to this goal.

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*The lunch will provide an opportunity to exchange information on the approaches taken to meet these challenges on both sides of the Atlantic and how the EU and the US might learn from each other's experience and can enhance their collaboration internationally.*

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