



CHANGING THE DEFAULT IN PROTEINS

Insights and transition pathways
of the LIKE-A-PRO Transition Arena



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1	Imprint	6	Main Recommendations
2	Transition arena on mainstreaming alternative proteins – What and Why?	I	National governments
3	Main messages	II	EU policymakers
4	Our Vision for 2040	III	Education and research organisations
5	Transition Pathways	IV	Food supply chain
I	Leveraging national commitments	V	Civil society organisations and communities
II	Ensuring price parity & beyond	7	Examples of frontrunning initiatives
III	Nudging behavioural change	8	Conclusions
IV	Accelerating the development of alternative proteins	9	Members of the Food Actor Network
V	Empowering food and health professionals		Participants
			Facilitators

Table of Contents

Imprint

1

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Transition arena on mainstreaming alternative proteins

What and Why?

LIKE-A-PRO is an EU Horizon-funded project aiming to facilitate sustainable and healthy diets by shifting promising **alternative proteins (AP)** and products from niche to mainstream. The project organised a **transition arena** to discuss the topic and co-create **transition pathways** with a selected frontrunner network. A transition arena is a workshop method based on the transition management research approach. It involves a series of workshop interactions, in which a selected group of frontrunner actors develop future transition pathways based on a co-created vision and aims. This report presents the main findings of the transition arena.

The participants of this transition arena formed a group called the **Food Actor Network (FAN)**. It included 52 frontrunner middle-food system entities, spanning 22 countries in Europe. The entities range from food retail & provisioning, food storage, transport & trade and food processing to umbrella entities, civil society organisations and researchers. The members of the network include both partners of the LIKE-A-PRO project as well as invited stakeholders representing different parts of the **food value chain** (see the list of participants at the end of this report).

The FAN was established in 2024, and the six online transition arena workshops took place between September 2024 and April 2025. The work was led by think tank Demos Helsinki.

Read more about the project here: <https://www.like-a-pro.eu/>.



Main Messages

The **main message** of the Food Actor Network is that we should **change the default in protein** production and consumption in all of Europe. What is today called alternative should be mainstream, and conventional meat proteins should be the alternative ones.

Strategies Identified

We identified three key dual strategies needed to reach systemic change:

1

We need to reduce meat and dairy consumption **AND** increase the consumption of alternative proteins.

2

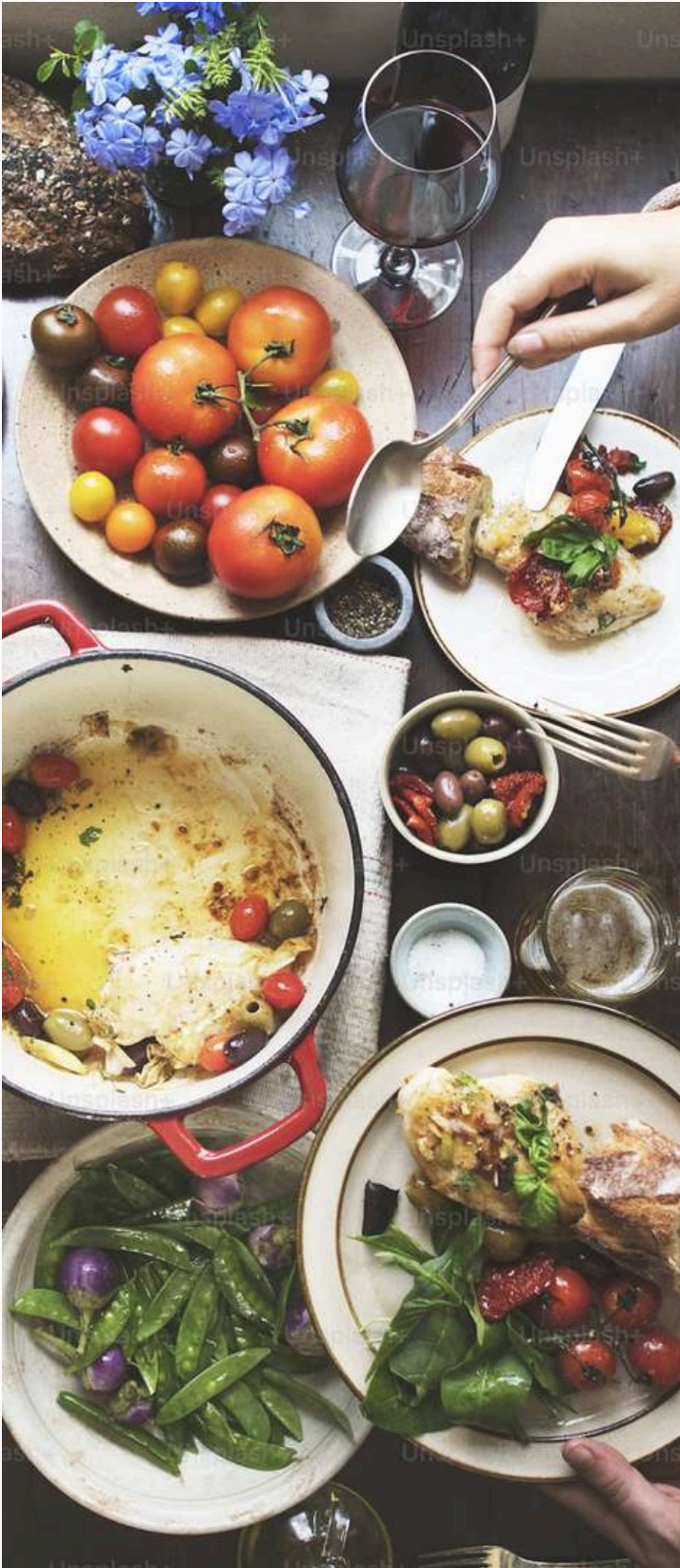
We need to diversify alternatives by developing novel protein sources **AND** value traditional, minimally processed plant-based protein sources.

3

We need to mimic conventional animal-based products for easy substitution **AND** develop innovative products for building new consumption habits.



Our vision for the future



Vision for 2040

At the beginning of the transition arena work, the Food Actor Network co-created the following vision for 2040:

By 2040, alternative proteins have been mainstreamed in Europe. This has made it possible for Europeans to change their diets to consume an average of 300g of red meat per week, following the latest nutrition recommendations in several EU countries.

This represents an average reduction of **one-third** in red meat consumption compared to 2022 levels in the EU-27 countries (FAO, 2024). However, there are significant differences in meat consumption across European countries.

In addition, the Food Actor Network highlighted the importance of shifting from dairy to plant-based products, both for health and environmental reasons.

For more information about the nutrition recommendations, see, for example:

[Germany](#)

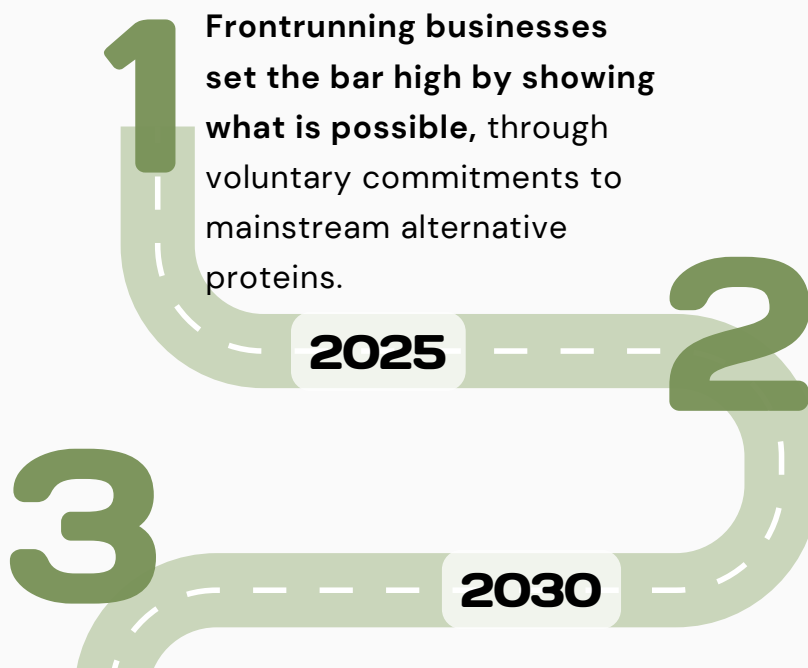
[Nordic countries](#)

- I. Leveraging national commitments
- II. Ensuring price parity & beyond
- III. Nudging behavioural change
- IV. Accelerating the development of alternative proteins
- V. Empowering food and health professionals

Transition Pathways

The Food Actor Network co-created five future pathways from today to 2040. The complementing pathways highlight the key steps to reach the vision.

I. Leveraging national commitments



1 Frontrunning businesses set the bar high by showing what is possible, through voluntary commitments to mainstream alternative proteins.

NGOs, companies and trade associations organise around **advocacy** for national policies and industry-level collaboration to mainstream alternative proteins.

2025

3

2030

Member States commit to reducing meat and dairy and mainstreaming APs through national targets, strategies, and policies.

APs are explicitly considered not just in supply-side but also demand-side food policies.

2035

4

The EU harmonises and supports action in Member States, by improving food monitoring, reviewing Novel Foods Regulation, and by establishing an EU platform to support collaboration on and implementation of integrated food policies in Member States.

By 2040, **nutritional recommendations and national policies across EU Member States are aligned to support the mainstream adoption of alternative proteins** and the fair transition away from animal-based proteins, taking into account nutritional, health, climate, environmental and social impacts.

II. Ensuring price parity & beyond

Retailers make strategic decisions to support price parity between conventional animal-based and alternative proteins to nudge consumer choices.

1

2025

Followed by active advocacy by frontrunners, EU member states start using national financial instruments to support price parity (e.g., equal or reduced VAT, meat tax).

2

The development of a coherent knowledge base of impacts has led to experiments on **true pricing of protein products** in a growing number of EU Member States.

2030

3

2035

The next EU CAP reduces direct subsidies for livestock production and increases subsidy support for **protein-rich crops** (e.g., legumes incl. soybeans). It also emphasises long-term sustainability and rural development based on incentivising eco-friendly practices and RDI of alternative proteins.

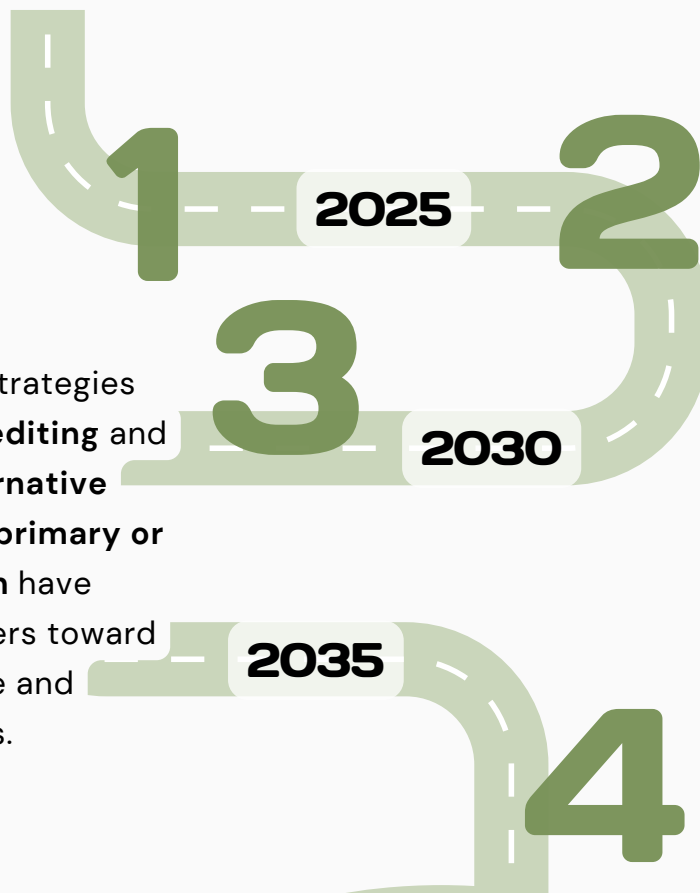
4

By 2040, subsidising meat and dairy production has turned into price parity of different protein products. **True pricing of products based on their environmental, social and health impacts is widely in use.** This has largely supported the shift of diets to follow the nutrition recommendations.

III. Nudging behavioural change

The food industry develops **novel and innovative protein products for early adopters** alongside **meat and dairy alternatives** designed to appeal to the broader consumer base.

The food industry focuses on **increasing the availability of alternative proteins and products**, which significantly increases consumers' ability to purchase them.



Retailers' bold strategies such as **choice editing** and **positioning alternative proteins as the primary or preferred option** have nudged consumers toward more sustainable and healthier choices.

Nutrition education on different levels about new protein sources has become standard practice in schools and public institutions. These initiatives aim to **increase acceptance, familiarity, and skills for using alternative proteins** from an early age.

By 2040, **alternative proteins have become the default choice and a mainstream part of the average consumer's diet**. Alternative proteins are widely available, affordable across all socioeconomic groups, and designed to align with diverse culinary traditions across the world.

IV. Accelerating the development of alternative proteins

Member States support producers for investing in alternative protein **infrastructure and RDI** (e.g., with national subsidies).

Flexible regulatory framework initiatives start to take place, balancing regulatory stability with adaptability.

The **EU Novel Food Regulation** has been adapted to facilitate **faster market entry** for alternative proteins beyond just plant-based options.

Clear and informative labelling, including standardising terminology for alternative products, ensures clarity and supports the protein shift.

New records in investments in new innovation and technologies on alternative protein development in the EU.

Strengthened EU Public-Private Partnerships lead to increased investments in RDI and scaling opportunities.

By 2040, innovation investments and flexible regulatory frameworks have created a **faster market entry, increased availability, and acceptance of novel alternative protein products.**

V. Empowering food and health professionals ¹⁰

Large-scale food service providers, such as schools and public canteens, receive **financial incentives** and educational support to incorporate healthy and tasty alternative protein options into their menus.

1

2

2025

Professional chefs and culinary schools have incorporated APs as a standard part of their curricula. Professional chefs recognise alternative proteins as suitable and desirable ingredients in their cooking.

2030

3

Various challenges, awards, and contests foster a vibrant culture of creativity and inspiration for food professionals around the world to work on further developing recipes utilising APs.

Healthcare professionals, such as doctors and dietitians, receive **continuous science-based education on the nutritional value and health benefits of APs**, being able to answer consumers' and patients' questions and recommend their use.

2035

4

5

The expanding culture of developing new alternative proteins has created a social media landscape, where influencers actively promote and explore the diverse world of plant-based cuisine, further solidifying its position as a mainstream choice.

By 2040, alternative proteins have been embraced by health professionals and nutritionists as healthy, common and varied sources of protein. Professional chefs use and experiment in their cuisine with plant-based and other alternative proteins that have spread to food cultures around the EU.

- I. National governments
- II. EU policymakers
- III. Education and research organisations
- IV. Food supply chain
- V. Civil society organisations and communities

Main Recommendations

The Food Actor Network gathered a list of immediate action recommendations for key actors on a national and international level to support accelerating the transitions.

I. National Governments

Create programmes to **support livestock farmers** in a just transition to plant-based protein production.

Use national financial instruments, such as equal or reduced VAT and meat taxes, to **support price parity** and level the playing field for APs.

Launch national educational and awareness campaigns **promoting alternative protein** food products.

Develop and implement **national targets and strategies** aimed at reducing meat and dairy production and consumption.

Provide financial support for **food education** and ensure that curricula across various education sectors widely recognise the importance of nutrition education on alternative proteins.



II. EU Policymakers

Provide consistent information on the **environmental impacts** of alternative proteins across EU Member States. For example, establish an EU Observatory to support the accumulation of knowledge and development of healthy and sustainable food environments.

Provide grants and funding for research and startups in **development and innovation activities** of new alternative protein sources.

Increase **subsidies** for alternative proteins to balance them with those for animal-based proteins to promote production and price parity. This should be done both at the Member State and at the EU level (e.g., through the CAP).

Enhance **clarity** of labelling and standardise terminology for alternative proteins to ensure transparent consumer information.

Include agriculture in the EU Emissions Trading System to incentivise the production of **low-emission food sources** such as peas and legumes.

Review the **Novel Foods Regulation** to create clearer approval pathways and enable dialogue during the process, to accelerate introduction of new alternative proteins without compromising on safety.



III. Education and research organisations

Organise **communication campaigns** together with healthcare institutions, daycare centres, and universities, highlighting the importance and practical applications of alternative proteins, particularly from a health and future-generation perspective.

Integrate food education, including alternative protein awareness, into school **curricula** and public institutions.

Advocate for including alternative proteins in school **meal programmes** and national **nutrition guidelines**.

Provide continuous **science-based education** for healthcare professionals on the nutritional benefits of alternative proteins.

Develop accessible, fact-based materials on alternative proteins to **fight against the myths** of alternative proteins.



IV. Food supply chain

Collaboration across the food supply chain: Strengthen **partnerships** between primary producers, the food industry, and retailers by leveraging each sector's expertise.

Industry Actors

Invest in **research and development** to improve the taste, texture, and overall sensory experience of alternative proteins and products.

Integrate alternative proteins into ready-made meals and hybrid products to increase accessibility and appeal.

Use clear, engaging labelling and familiar product descriptions to **attract** consumers.

Retailers

Establish industry-wide **commitments** among major retailers to set clear targets and align on a shared vision for alternative proteins.

Implement **pricing strategies** to achieve price parity, such as customer reward programmes, and reduce the promotion of animal-based protein products.

Enhance **visibility** through prime shelf placement and in-store sampling opportunities.



V. Civil society organisations and communities

Social media influencers actively **promote plant-based cuisine** and participate in awareness campaigns to highlight the benefits of alternative proteins and address topics of health, sustainability, and taste concerns to make them more appealing.

Frontrunning organisations **involve consumers** in the transition to alternative proteins, as well as promote country-wide **campaigns** such as 'Week Without Meat' to encourage the public to reduce meat consumption and explore alternatives.

CSOs, companies, and trade associations should **advocate for national policies** and industry-level collaborations to mainstream alternative proteins. Coordinated lobbying efforts can accelerate regulatory support and market integration.

CSOs should **advocate municipal governments** to **introduce alternative options in public food programs**, such as hospitals and schools, ensuring local-level adoption and normalization.



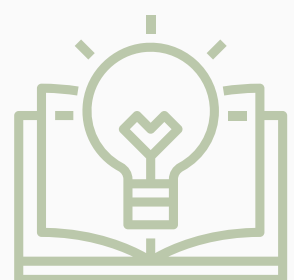
Examples of frontrunning initiatives



Various EU store chains have pledged to ensure a 50/50 (Aldi, Dirk, Ekoplaza), and some a 60/40 (Lidl, Plus, Jumbo, Albert Heijn) **balance between plant and animal-based proteins in their product sales**. To reach that target, they ensure a price ratio between (private label) APs and animal-based proteins by 2030.



Week Without Meat: Yearly campaign to encourage people to eat a plant-based protein diet for 7 days in the Netherlands, expanding later to Belgium, Germany and Denmark – the Dutch campaign has evolved to also remove dairy products for the week.



STRATKIT (Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit): Toolkit designed to help stakeholders involved in public meal provision to implement innovative strategies for enhancing the sustainability of public catering services by focusing on aspects like sustainable procurement and menu planning.

Conclusion

There is a growing consumer interest in the EU towards more **sustainable and healthy diets**. Replacing conventional animal-based products with alternative proteins such as plant, ocean, or fungus-based proteins, has a positive impact on **both health and the environment**. The availability of alternative protein products has increased significantly, offering new options for consumers. However, this shift has yet to translate into widespread changes in European dietary patterns. The transformation of the food system is still in its early stages, requiring sustained efforts across policy, industry, and society to accelerate progress. **Phasing out meat and dairy and mainstreaming sustainable alternatives** is a complex transition that unfolds over time, shaped by cultural norms, market dynamics, and policy frameworks.

This report presented five transition pathways and recommendations for accelerating the change. It was co-created by a large group of food actors from 22 European countries. Changing the default in proteins is a substantial systemic challenge. At the same time, the transition **begins with small actions**: what we eat, promote and have as a default within our institutions, and how we contribute to shaping a more sustainable food system through our work. Every step, from individual decisions to structural changes, plays a role in making sustainable protein options the new norm. Now is the time to move from awareness to action, ensuring that the momentum for change translates into **lasting transformation**.



Participants

19

The following people participated in one or more of the Transition arena workshops. The authors of the report are solely responsible for the results presented.

68 North

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In addition, five people did not give consent to include their name to the list.

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20

The following people took part in facilitating the Transition arena workshops:

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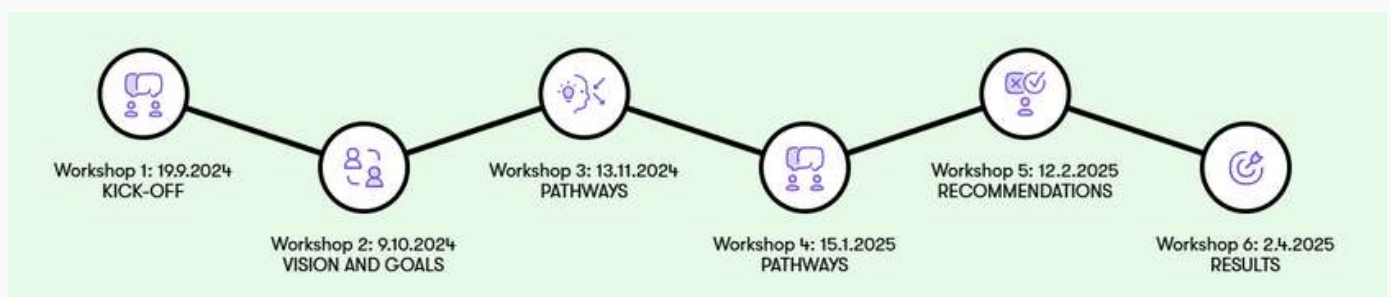
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The transition arena consisted of six co-creation workshops.



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