



Transformative Governance for Food Systems & Biodiversity

towards a common framework for implementation across sectors and governance levels

Highlights and key messages from the Danish EU Presidency Conference on Transformative Governance for Food Systems and Biodiversity in Copenhagen on 3 December 2026



Ministry of Green Transition

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Conference recordings available at: www.bioeconomy.ku.dk/conference-3rd-december

Executive summary

To strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of the agriculture and food system while delivering on climate, biodiversity and health in the European Union requires an integrated policy approach across the bioeconomy and food systems. The key message from the conference points to the need for a transformation of governance that is inclusive, coherent across sectors and levels, and capable of learning by doing. This means coupling democratic directionality and co-creation with clear roles across EU, national and local authorities and stakeholders, so decisions are legitimate and delivery is steady and adaptive. It also means building an evidence base as a backbone for integrating soil, biodiversity, water, climate, health, welfare and wellbeing in decision-making. Key ambitions are to better link production and consumption through public procurement, and to support farmers, businesses and other actors in co-creating and deploying innovation, by de-risking and rewarding contributions to sustainability and resilience. This paper synthesises the objectives, content and key messages from the opening session, three parallel policy sessions, ten parallel workshops, and the final rotating panel discussion. It concludes with future steps for turning shared principles into everyday practice across governance levels.



Background and target groups

This conference outcome paper provides an overview of the highlights and key messages from the Danish EU Presidency Conference on Transformative Governance for Food Systems and Biodiversity, which took place in Copenhagen on 3 December 2026. The conference was organized by the University of Copenhagen in close collaboration with the Horizon Europe project CLEVERFOOD/FOOD 2030 Networks, IPBES in Denmark and State of Green, and was supported by Horizon Europe, the Novo Nordisk Foundation.

It is written for EU institutions, Member States and regions, cities and municipalities, researchers, farmers, civil society and finance actors who must work together to implement governance that achieves fair and lasting change. Each session and workshop below is summarised with a short statement of objectives, a brief narrative of the content, and key messages that speak to the design and implementation of transformative governance for food systems and biodiversity.



Opening session: Shaping a resilient and competitive future for agriculture, food systems and biodiversity

Introduction by conference host Marin Rose, Co-coordinator of the CLEVERFOOD project, University of Copenhagen

Welcome address by Bo Jellesmark Thorsen, Dean of the Faculty of Science, University of Copenhagen

Moderated by Christian Bugge Henriksen, Coordinator of the CLEVERFOOD Project, University of Copenhagen

Presentations and discussions with:

- Jacob Jensen, Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark
- Esther de Lange, Head of Cabinet for Christophe Hansen, Agriculture and Food, European Commission
- Paula Harrison, Professor, Co-chair IPBES Nexus Assessment, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH)
- Jacqueline Broerse, Professor, Director of Athena Institute, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Objectives

The opening session established that transforming the governance of agriculture and food systems is essential if Europe is to align climate and biodiversity targets with resilience and competitiveness. Participants were invited into a collaborative, no-blame space where embracing diversity and co-creation guides the move from inspiration to implementation. The session asked how to coordinate EU direction with national and local action in a way that remains inclusive and credible.

Content highlights

Following a warm, inclusive introduction, a welcome address and a crisp framing of the opening session, the presentations and discussions tied together the EU Vision for Agriculture and Food, the CAP post-2027 context and broader strategic directions. It underlined that competitiveness and sustainability must reinforce one another, that subsidiarity requires both top-down frameworks and bottom-up practice, and that joint evidence from Nexus and One-Health perspectives should steer choices. Food policy networks and living labs were presented as channels that turn policy into place-based delivery and bring lessons back to decision makers.



Key messages

- Align policies across sectors and levels through inclusive co-creation and democratic directionality.
- Pair the green transition with a viable farmer business case that values public goods and unlocks innovation.
- Measure, learn and act together using indicators that capture interlinkages, then adjust course as evidence emerges.
- Link production with consumption by using public procurement to create demand for healthier, more diverse and nature-positive foods.



Parallel policy sessions: From vision to implementation - aligning policies for change

Session A: Agriculture and food systems: EU policies, strategies and regulation

Moderated by Thom Achterbosch, Senior Researcher, Wageningen University & Research

Presentations and discussions with:

- Diego Canga Fano, Deputy Director General, DG AGRI
- Richard Zaltzman, CEO, EIT Food
- Christine Chemnitz, Director, Agora Agriculture
- Joanna Drake, Deputy Director General, DG RTD

Objectives

The session set out to connect EU food and bioeconomy related policies families so that integration becomes the operating principle for delivery. It explored how to move from excellent innovation to deployable innovation that reaches farms and value chains. It also examined instruments that can reduce first-mover risks and reward outcomes that matter to society.

Content highlights

The discussions covered complementarities across CAP, Bioeconomy, Climate, Biodiversity, Health, Horizon, Missions, and Life Sciences strategies. It recognised financing and capacity gaps and called for outcome-based and de-risking instruments that attract private capital while staying fair to farmers and SMEs. It examined the need to balance ambitious policy targets with adaptive implementation and context-specific delivery mechanisms. It called for partnership on systemic innovation, and for food systems monitoring as anchor for evidence and learning.

Key messages

- Coherence must guide action across strategies and instruments
- Innovation needs to be farmer-centred and finance-ready with advisory support and de-risking in place
- Targets should be clear while implementation remains adaptive and grounded in trust and bridge-building



Session B: Biodiversity: Global and European strategies and regulations

Moderated by Lars Dinesen, Coordinator of IPBES in Denmark

Presentations and discussions with:

- Carsten Rahbek, Professor, Head of Center for Macroecology, Evolution and Climate, University of Copenhagen
- Paula Harrison, Professor, Co-chair IPBES Nexus Assessment, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH)
- Alexandra Vakrou, Head of Unit, DG ENV, Green Knowledge & Research Hub, LIFE

Objectives

The session brought biodiversity evidence into the centre of governance. It focused on moving from protection to conservation and restoration, the indicators that can guide decisions, and the governance required to integrate biodiversity with food, water, climate and health.

Content highlights

Evidence showed biodiversity as foundational to a single, interconnected crisis landscape. The conversation pointed to outcome-oriented indicators such as soil organic carbon and high-diversity landscape features, and it highlighted the potential of Nexus governance that is inclusive and adaptive. Participants reflected on finance gaps and the need to realign incentives, phase out harmful subsidies and scale payments that reward nature-positive action. Capacity constraints and political cycles were discussed openly as barriers that must be managed through representative engagement and honest evaluation.

Key messages

- Put biodiversity accounting at the core of governance, aligned with internationally agreed targets
- Govern with an integrated lens and realign finance to what works for conservation, restoration and resilience
- Advance conservation and restoration with adaptive implementation that measures effects and strengthens capacity over time



Session C: The Danish Green Tripartite Agreement: collaboration and coordination

Moderated by Signe Skjoldborg Brieghel, Tenure Track Assistant Professor, University of Copenhagen

Presentations and discussions with:

- Henrik Vejre, Professor, University of Copenhagen
- Birgit S. Hansen, Green Tripartite representative, Local Government Denmark
- Peter Østergård Have, Deputy Director, Agency for Green Transition

Objectives

This case explained how national targets can become local land-use changes through structured collaboration. It explored barriers and enablers for rewetting peatlands, creating wetlands and forests, reducing nutrients and restoring biodiversity while safeguarding a viable agricultural sector.

Content highlights

Municipal leadership of local tripartite groups was shown to be pivotal. Significant public funding supported voluntary action first while proportionate regulation was kept ready for the last stretch where collective outcomes depend on area-wide action. The session covered the importance of trust, capacity and transparent progress tracking and acknowledged challenges around land tenure, timelines and expertise.

Key messages

- Connect local collaboration to national steering so barriers are removed quickly.
- Use voluntary action backed by strong financing then apply proportionate rules where essential to achieve shared outcomes.
- Prioritise rewetting and other high-impact measures within strategic spatial planning that respects farming's role.

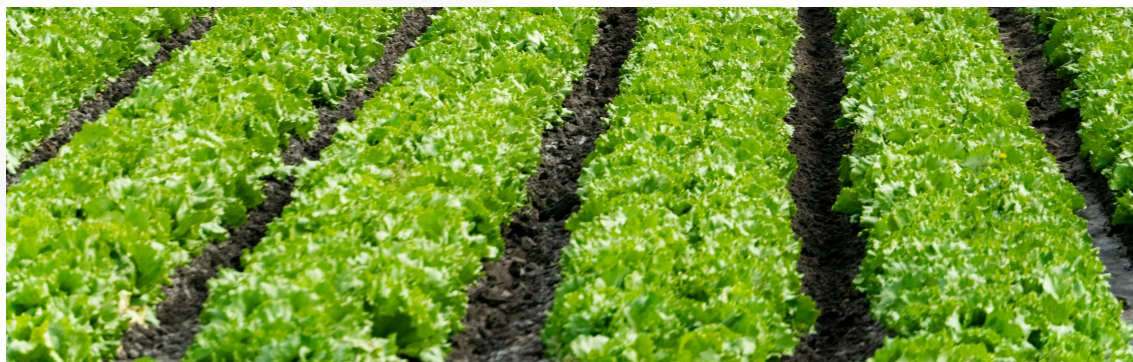


Photo by Theo Braddock



Parallel workshops: From knowledge to impact - building coherent pathways for transformation

Track I: How can we develop evidence-based policies on agriculture, food systems and biodiversity using a whole systems approach?

Track coordinator: Kris Kok, Assistant Professor, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

IA: What exactly is transformative governance for agriculture, food systems and biodiversity

Organised by Michelle Betsil, Professor, University of Copenhagen

Objectives

The workshop clarified what must change in governance, for whom and how quickly. It used mapping and visioning to explore different pathways and asked participants to consider the governance approaches that would make those pathways real.

Content and key messages

Participants reflected on desired futures and the structures that either enable or block them. They surfaced the value of shared concepts, a common language and practical tools that help actors move beyond siloed efforts. The session encouraged attention to pace and to the distribution of benefits and burdens and to who gets a voice at the table when choices are made.

IB: How to apply food systems science to support transformative governance and evidence-based policymaking

Organised by Stine Rosenlund Hansen, Associate Professor, Roskilde University together with Kerstin Pasch, Head of DIL and Ana Moragues Faus, Senior Research Fellow, University of Barcelona

Objectives

The workshop examined how to turn food systems science into actionable tools for policy and innovation. It asked how to address barriers and



lock-ins, how to bridge conflicting interests and how to ensure that research questions follow real policy needs.

Content and key messages

Three themes stood out. First, structured and permanent dialogue between science and policy is needed with space for under-represented groups whose knowledge is often missing. Second, food system frameworks can be combined with participatory methods to build shared understanding across scales though newcomers need time and guidance to use these tools well. Third, power needs to be brought into the analysis explicitly with methods that can reveal who holds visible, hidden and perceived power in specific contexts.

IC: Living labs and policy councils as enablers of transformative change in local food systems

Organised by Chiara Roticiiani, Project Coordinator, Eurocities together with Anna Kirkegaard Vaarst, Head of office, ICROFS and Mette Frimodt-Møller, Living lab coordinator, University of Copenhagen

Objectives

The workshop focused on how experimentation becomes policy. It discussed governance structures that sustain learning and practical ways to ensure that insights from living labs and food policy councils are integrated into formal decision making.

Content and key messages

Participants shared experience on translating pilots and demonstrations into durable rules and routines. They highlighted the value of municipal anchoring, clear mandates and channels that let evidence travel from projects into planning, budgeting and regulation. They called for governance models that accompany experimentation over time rather than treating it as a one-off event.



ID: Overcoming polarisation and bridging the rural-urban divide

Organised by Katrien Martens, Co-founder and Manon Schots, Project Lead of The Protein Project together with Christian Bugge Henriksen, University of Copenhagen

Objectives

The workshop set out to address divisive narratives by actively seeking common ground. It invited participants to state positions, explore needs and fears and then re-word statements until a shared formulation could be reached.

Content and key messages

Participants found that open-minded listening is rare in daily practice yet it is essential to move beyond hardened positions. Re-phrasing polarising statements was demanding and time-consuming but it led to agreements that respected difference while reducing tensions. The session argued that this kind of work should be normalised and built into governance not left to ad hoc moments.



Photo by Sydney Arnold

Track II: How can we coordinate policies and regulations on agriculture, food systems and biodiversity with other policies across different governance levels?

Track coordinator: Madeleine Coste, Head of food, Eurocities

IIA: From policy to action - strengthening food security in times of uncertainty through approaches integrating One/Planetary Health & Biodiversity

Organised by Anant Jani, Senior Researcher, Heidelberg University and Anna Bruen, Senior Expert, ICLEI together with Jasmina van Driel, Senior Programme Manager, ZonMW

Objectives

The workshop explored how integrated approaches can make food systems more just, resilient and biodiversity-supportive in the face of climate shocks, health crises and social inequalities. It also looked at the science-policy-society interfaces that can carry this work forward.

Content and key messages

Participants discussed power and influence in food systems, the importance of high-level political buy-in and the need to measure impact without imposing unrealistic burdens on local initiatives. They proposed practical entry points that already exist in cities and regions from spatial planning and procurement to climate and health plans. They called for practices that rebalance power including the use of randomly selected citizen councils as a way to widen the circle of influence.

IIB: Coordinating policies to shape food environments in favour of cultivated biodiversity

Organised by Yuna Chiffolleau, Research Director, INRAE together with Dalia Mattioni, Research Associate, University of Pisa

Objectives

The session aimed to clarify terms and gather real examples of policies that can strengthen cultivated biodiversity with attention to how upstream and downstream levers connect.

Content and key messages

Many effective levers sit on the consumption side. Public procurement, food education and retail incentives can help bring neglected and under-utilised crops into everyday diets. Participants urged the use of existing instruments



and asked that modest additions be made that can have disproportionate benefits for example adjustments to procurement guidance or fiscal measures that make legumes more affordable.

IIC: Multi-level food governance: Co-creating pathways for integrated food policy in Europe

Organised by Luka Gudek, PhD candidate, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam together with Juliane Gleitze, Program Officer, ZonMW

Objectives

The workshop invited participants to identify barriers to integrated food policy and to name instruments that have worked in their settings.

Content and key messages

Mechanisms like policy dialogues and informal networks can help but they need to be supported by explicit mandates, roadmaps and funding that survive political cycles. The discussion proposed national-level coordinating bodies that maintain science-policy-society interfaces and provide capacity building to local and regional actors. It also stressed the need to recognise the societal value that farmers provide and to engage them in ways that build trust.

IID: Innovating coordination in European agrifood policies

Organised by Teis Hansen, Professor, University of Copenhagen

Objectives

The session asked why coordination is needed, what challenges stand in the way and how it can be improved.

Content and key messages

Participants observed that coordination problems often stem from political constraints, siloed institutions and unclear mandates, not from a lack of structures on paper. They argued for clear political mandates, a recognised convener and decision rules that avoid watered-down compromises. They also called for stronger involvement of cities, civil society and citizens and for decentralised processes that include all relevant actors.





Photo by Jean Wimmerlin

Track III: How can we advance ESG frameworks and investment strategies to restore biodiversity and support a fair, healthy and sustainable agriculture and food system?

Track coordinator: Thom Achterbosch, Senior Researcher, Wageningen University & Research

IIIA: Increasing investment in biodiversity and food systems transformation

Organised by Sabine Descka, Senior Research Coordinator, together with Irina Verweij-Novikova, Senior Project Manager, Wageningen University & Research

Objectives

The workshop explored how to align policy, science, finance and industry so investment flows to the right places. It looked at targets, metrics and the visibility of practice that is already emerging.



Content and key messages

Participants noted the importance of clear direction and harmonised metrics that translate ambition into actionable signals for investors and value chains. They observed that awareness of methods like life cycle assessment remains uneven and asked for efforts that create a shared language while staying practical. Policy uncertainty was named as a barrier that deters investment which is why stable direction and consistent standards matter for risk management.

IIIB: Blended finance and social innovation for agrifood business models that reward soil health and biodiversity

Organised by Erik Mathijs, Professor, KU Leuven

Objectives

The session examined how to shift incentives from short-term productivity to long-term regeneration and how to ensure that knowledge and capacity keep pace with financial instruments.

Content and key messages

Soil health and biodiversity must be treated as core assets. Financial models should reward outcomes that rebuild these assets while knowledge systems are strengthened as infrastructure. The group pointed to disproportionate administrative burdens on small farms and asked for context-sensitive governance that reduces complexity and creates differentiated pathways.



Photo by Marc Pell



Closing session: Turning insights into action for transformative governance of agriculture, food systems and biodiversity

Strategic Reflections on Transformative Governance and the Bioeconomy

Speech by James Morrison, Director of Healthy Planet, European Commission

Highlights and key messages: The strategic reflections stressed that food systems, climate and the bioeconomy are inseparable and that governance must combine top-down direction with bottom-up initiatives. Participants were urged to be explicit about trade-offs, to place research and innovation at the heart of solutions, and focus on implementation and buy-in so policies become practice. The speech pointed to the EU's Food 2030 legacy and to current initiatives (the Bioeconomy Strategy, Life Sciences Strategy and a forthcoming Biotech Act) as enablers, but argued that the missing angle is governance that is co-created with stakeholders, makes change investable and builds local–EU learning loops. We need a transformation of governance that involves everyone and turns ideas into everyday action.

Rotating panel discussion with track leaders and parallel workshop participants

Moderated by: Christian Bugge Henriksen, Coordinator of the CLEVERFOOD project, University of Copenhagen

Panel 1:

Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Deputy Head, DG AGRI

Inge Arents, Managing Director, Flanders Food

Betina Bergmann Jensen, Head of Procurement, Municipality of Copenhagen

Rasmus Sandorff, chairperson, Organic Youth Denmark

Panel 2:

Claude Yven, Head of the food thematic unit, ANRE

Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl, Secretary General, Danish Vegetarian Association

Paola Plaku, Senior Policy and Project Officer, Fair Trade Advocacy Organization

Sybille Kyed, Agricultural and food policy manager, Danish Organic Association



Panel 3:

Rosalinda Scalia, Deputy Head of Unit, DG RTD

Edwina Hughes, Head of Partnerships and Engagement, WRI

Ida Auken, Member of Danish Parliament

Katina Staleva, Bioeconomy Youth Ambassador, European Commission

Objectives

The rotating panel synthesised insights and identified levers, partnerships and governance approaches that can move Europe from concept to implementation. It asked what elements define transformative governance, what practices have succeeded or failed and how we can move together in the coming years.

Content highlights

The panel urged a shift from the governance of transformation to a transformation of governance. It called for iterative learning cycles across levels, genuine bridging between top-down targets and bottom-up delivery and a focus on collaboration that is investable because it is backed by data, incentives and fair rules. Cities and procurement were highlighted for their near-term impact on diets and emissions, while youth participation and safe, structured dialogues were emphasized to build trust and reduce polarisation. A balanced approach emerged as a practical pathway where generous support for voluntary action and proportionate regulation help close the final gaps for shared outcomes.

Key messages

- Institutionalise plan–act–learn–adapt cycles across governance levels so implementation improves through evidence and feedback
- Use public procurement and city action to create demand for healthier, more diverse and nature-positive foods
- Make collaboration investable with outcome-based instruments, robust biodiversity/soil metrics and clear, fair rules across supply chains
- Apply carrot then stick: enable voluntary action with support and capacity-building, then use proportionate regulation to close remaining gaps





Overarching conclusion and future perspectives

The key messages from the conference point to a common framework with seven strands. First, embed inclusive co-creation and depolarisation-aware participation in decision making. Second, make coherence and adaptive delivery the norm so ambition is steady while practice remains flexible. Third, build an evidence backbone with indicators and feedback that help everyone steer from EU to municipalities. Fourth, support farmer adoption with advisory systems, de-risking and rewards that pay for outcomes valued by society. Fifth, create demand pull through procurement and food environments that normalise healthier and more diverse foods. Sixth, realign finance so capital and incentives flow to restoration, soil health and biodiversity. Seventh, invest in learning loops that publish progress, adjust course and protect momentum across political cycles.

A practical next step is to publish short implementation playbooks that turn these strands into routines for ministries, agencies, cities and regions. The conference messages encourage the formation of national coordinating bodies that maintain science-policy-society interfaces, and they ask that local learning be gathered through transparent dashboards so everyone can see change as it happens. None of this replaces politics or judgement. Instead, it builds trust in processes that are open, evidence-informed and fair, and that help Europe act together for food systems and biodiversity.



Notes: The key messages from the Danish EU Presidency Conference on Transformative Governance for Food Systems and Biodiversity informed the development of the CLEVERFOOD policy briefs: *“Implementing Transformative Governance for Food Systems and Biodiversity”* and *“R&I Flagships for Transformative Governance of the Agriculture and Food System”*, and provided inspiration for the completion of the European Commission Surveys: "Future-proofing EU Agri-Food through research and innovation", "EU Public Procurement Rules - Revision" and "Building Food 2040: a stakeholder consultation survey on the new Strategic R&I Agenda on Food Systems". Furthermore, the key messages will be integrated in CLEVERFOOD Deliverable D2.5 Models for transformative multilevel governance of the FS

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