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**Response by Sustain's Food and Mental Health Project
to the European Commission on its Green Paper:
*Promoting the mental health of the population. Towards a strategy
on mental health for the EU***

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent over 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level.

Sustain welcomes the proposal to create an EU-wide strategy and Action Plan on Mental Health. Our interest in this area arises out of our work to highlight the connection between food and mental health. We has recently produced a report, in partnership with the UK's Mental Health Foundation, detailing the growing evidence that the way that food is currently produced and consumed may be partly responsible for the increase being seen in mental health and behavioural problems. This report can be downloaded at www.sustainweb.org or we would be pleased to forward on a hard copy.

We were pleased to note that the Green Paper listed poor nutrition as a determinant of mental health in Annex 7. A great deal of evidence links a healthy diet – the same diet known to be beneficial for physical health– to good mental health and behaviour. The evidence also points to poor diets having a negative effect on mental health and behaviour, much in the same way as physical health is compromised by poor food intake.

For example, research has shown lower levels of depression in populations with healthy intakes of, amongst other nutrients, polyunsaturated fats and folate. There is also a great

deal of evidence showing links between hyperactivity in children and food additives, low mineral status and sugar consumption.

As such, the evidence supports the idea that the promotion of healthy food and eating would go some way in promoting good mental health and, potentially, preventing some mental health problems..

The adoption of poor diets are influenced by a number of factors, including education, cost, culture and availability. But, poor dietary choice can also be influenced by policy decisions, many of which are now made at the European level. These include: the Common Agricultural Policy, food labelling, competition law relating to food procurement and the Common Fisheries Policy. The creation of an EU-wide strategy on mental health could link these issues with the imperatives to improve mental health. As such, the establishment of a strategy on mental health should not only identify the “way that Community policies ...contribute to improving the mental health of the population” (Section 5) but **should also identify the ways that Community policies might be detrimental to the mental health of the population and seek ways to address these conflicts.**

Although the evidence linking food to mental health and behaviour is strong enough to recommend the inclusion of dietary improvements in the treatment of mental health patients, there is still a great deal of research to be done. Unfortunately, funding for dietary/mental health research is extremely limited for a variety of reasons. **As such, it would be beneficial to have a plan to coordinate EU research funding into mental health (Sections 6.3 and 7.3), which may highlight different priorities for research than are being explored presently.**

Finally, we **suggest that any EU-Platform on Mental Health (Section 7.2), the creation of which we support, includes representatives from the area of food policy and dietary health.** This should to ensure that the dietary and food policy aspects of preventing and treating mental health problems are fully addressed.

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