

A4.5 Policy instrument: Food and agricultural standards

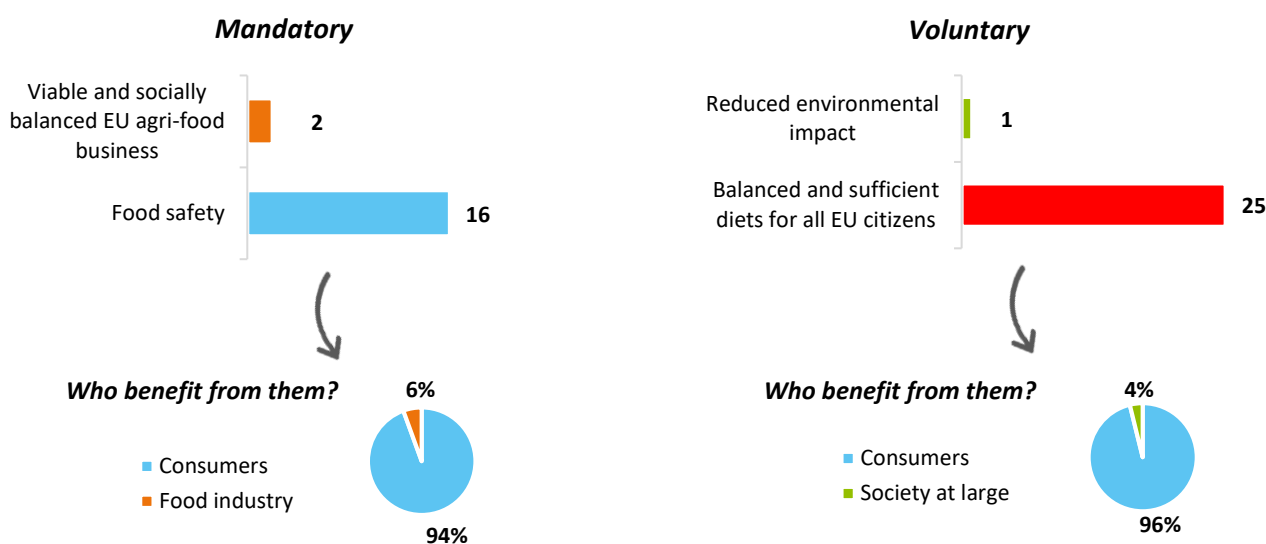
Food and agricultural standards are essential instruments to improve the **certainty, credibility** and **accountability** of food transactions by the food industry, discouraging irresponsible activities and rewarding beneficial efforts. Not only are they established to ensure food safety (*e.g.* by setting thresholds for maximum allowable levels of contaminants or additives in food), but also to reach all other policy goals linked to **FOOD2030 priorities**.

- **‘Product’ standards** specify the characteristics of the final products (*e.g.* shape, size, weight, safety, authenticity, energy, nutritional content and quality attributes).
- **‘Process’ standards** specify the production techniques used (*e.g.* organic, biological, free-range, environment-friendly, fair trade) at all different stages, from raw material processing to packaging and distribution.
- **‘Performance’ standards** specify the expected characteristics of food products at the different stages of the food system (*e.g.* the maximum allowable amount of pesticide residue on specific products at the time of purchase).

Food and agricultural standards continue to evolve in response to changes in technology, scientific developments regarding the risks associated with food and directly in response to consumer and societal demands, all factors that have contributed to make them more stringent and complex.

They can be either **mandatory** or **voluntary**: the former are legislative instruments enacted to ensure quality controls and protect consumers, the latter are non-binding commitments, recommendations or guidelines.

Proportion of mapped policies using food standards by GOAL

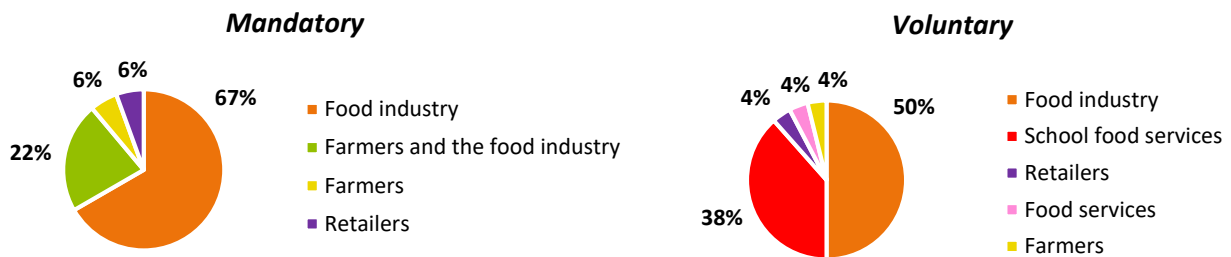


As it emerged from the mapping, we have found 25 policies on nutrition standards (*e.g.* national agreements to reduce salt, saturated fats or added sugars of food products; commitments to improve food nutritional quality; guidelines for school meals), 16 policies on food safety (*e.g.* limits on pesticide use; hygiene criteria on food production and processing; lists of safe food supplements, additives and enzymes), 2 policies regarding the agri-food business and only one environmental standard.

The two histograms above show a clear distinction depending of the degree of obligation: all food safety standards are compulsory, while nutrition ones are all voluntary.

*Would it be beneficial to make **nutrition and environmental standards** mandatory as well?*

Proportion of mapped policies using food standards by PRIMARY TARGET



The policy actor through which food and agricultural standards act the most is the **food industry**:

- as for **mandatory** standards (67%), companies, as well as farmers, are responsible for putting rules into practice while ensuring the effective functioning of the internal market and, ultimately, for the protection of human health;
- as for **voluntary** standards (50%), the food industry is encouraged to adjust the nutrient composition of the food produced according to specific agreements and commitments.

*Considering the important role played by **retailers**, why are they targeted only by 6% and 4% of the standards mapped?*

Many EU governments promote nutrition standards for on-site meals, mainly stressing the urgency to rebalance the nutrient content of the food offered and reduce unhealthy ingredients.

*How can **public authorities** enforce mandatory, and not just voluntary, standards for school meals?*

Apart from quantitative adjustments on nutrients, should public authorities make greater efforts to ensure that the food served is sustainable, fairly produced and environment-friendly?

*May **school gardens** providing fruit and vegetables and **agreements with local farmers** providing dairy and meat products ('farm to school' programmes) be best practices to be spread at EU level?*

*Are **media** targeted enough by governments to limit marketing to children of food and beverages that do not meet nutrition standards?*