

FAST-FORWARD

SYMPOSIUM

PLANT-BASED FOOD

**Foundations for an
increasingly plant-based future**

How lessons from Denmark can inspire European action



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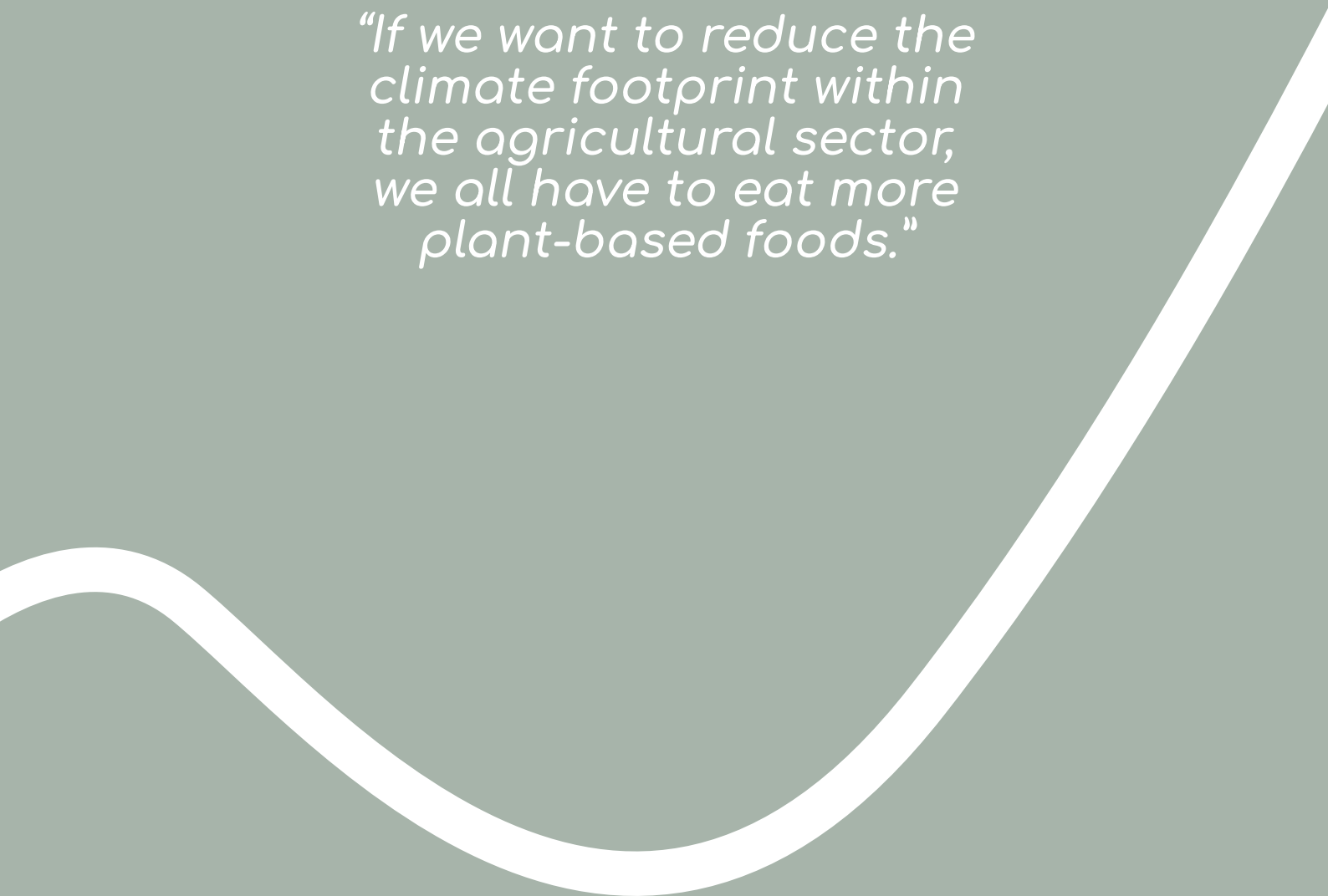
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“If we want to reduce the climate footprint within the agricultural sector, we all have to eat more plant-based foods.”



Foreword

by Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl

Denmark's journey toward more plant-rich diets is often described in terms of technologies, funding instruments, policy plans, and market developments. Those elements matter. But if there is one lesson I have learned from years of advocacy and dialogue as an idealist—and as Executive Director of the Vegetarian Society of Denmark—it is that progress ultimately depends on something more human: our ability to cooperate without having to agree on everything.

The most meaningful change rarely comes from perfect alignment. It comes from compromise in the best sense of the word: not abandoning principles but choosing to act where we can make common cause. In a society as diverse as ours, we will disagree—about pace, priorities, narratives, and the balance between tradition and transformation. Yet disagreement does not have to lead to paralysis. It can become “constructive dissent”: a willingness to voice differences with honesty, while still respecting one another and moving forward on shared goals.

That spirit is visible throughout this white paper. It documents Denmark's early leadership in plant-based initiatives and its distinctive collaborative culture—one that has enabled progress across ministries, research institutions, industry actors, and civil society. At the same time, it also makes clear that goodwill and inclusion alone are not enough. A patchwork of incentives, parallel programmes, and

limited institutional coordination risks slowing momentum precisely when coherence and continuity are most needed.

If Denmark is to continue leading, we must protect what has worked: inclusion, dialogue, and a focus on shared societal outcomes. But we must also be willing to strengthen what is missing: clearer mandates, stronger alignment across initiatives, and governance structures that turn ambition into consistent action. This is not just a Danish concern. It is also a matter for the rest of the EU, where each member state will hopefully create plant-based policy frameworks that match their different challenges and opportunities. At EU level, a common strategic framework and funding scheme is needed, to strengthen collaboration and ensure that funding is available for stakeholders across all member states. What is required, both within member states and at EU level, is the courage to build bridges between different interests, and the patience to create institutions that sustain collaboration over time.

I hope this white paper will be read in that spirit: as an invitation to cooperate, to coordinate, and to keep moving—together—where we can.

Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl
Executive Director, Vegetarian Society of Denmark

Foreword

by Marie Louise Boisen Lendal

A food system doesn't change because one sector "gets it right." It changes when many sectors move—together, in the same direction, even if they don't agree on everything along the way.

That's why this white paper matters. It shows how Denmark has come far on plant-based and plant-rich diets not only through policy and funding, but through something more powerful: a culture of dialogue that makes cooperation possible across differences. Farmers, food companies, researchers, ministries, NGOs, and innovators have managed to find shared goals—without forcing fake consensus. And that is exactly what a transition looks like in real life: messy, negotiated, and still moving.

As Chair of Frej, I care deeply about where this is going. Our ambition is simple to say, and hard to do: that every food business—from farmers to global corporations—transforms in respect of planetary boundaries. Not as a branding exercise, not as a niche trend, but as a real shift in how we produce, sell, and serve food. Because the truth is: we don't get endless overdraft on the planet's account.

And the key to making that shift is inclusion. Not "talking at" each other but building a democratic conversation where more people are in the room—and where it's safe to disagree and still stay engaged.

For me, the value of this analysis lies in its balance. It does not romanticise the transition, and it does not reduce it to

conflict. Instead, it shows how a unifying narrative—rooted in sustainability, competitiveness, and public value—can create space for practical cooperation. And it reminds us that coordination is not bureaucracy for its own sake; it is the connective tissue that allows learning, trust, and investment to reinforce one another rather than fragment.

The plant-based transition is sometimes framed as a cultural battle. I believe it is better understood as a collective project. We can respect each other's starting points—and still agree that healthier diets, resilient food systems, and a more sustainable future are in everyone's interest. The question is not whether we can eliminate disagreement. The question is whether we can use our agreements—however partial—to build lasting progress.

This white paper offers lessons not just for Denmark, but for Europe: collaboration can create momentum, but momentum needs structure to last. If we want plant-based innovation to move from promising projects to a coherent system, we must keep widening the circle—and strengthen the coordination that turns shared ambition into shared action.

Let's stay ambitious. Let's stay constructive. And let's keep talking—across sectors, across generations, and across the lines we usually draw—until the future we want becomes the food system we have.

Marie Louise Boisen Lendal
Director for the think tank Frej



Introduction

Transforming food systems is now a global imperative. The OECD, UN, and WHO all highlight how current systems drive climate change, biodiversity loss, and poor human health, while also remaining vulnerable to disruptions and inequalities (OECD, 2023; UN, 2023; WHO, 2021).

The EU's Farm to Fork Strategy calls for a fundamental shift to more sustainable, resilient, and fair food systems. A key element in this transformation is accelerating the transition toward a more plant-based diet, which has clear co-benefits for health, climate, and food security (European Commission, 2020).

Denmark has historically focused on organic and environmentally conscious food systems, with the first Danish Or-

ganic Farming Act dating back to 1987 (*Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2023*).

In 2024, Denmark made history with the world's first national plant-based action plan, setting a clear political objective to accelerate the shift towards a more plant-centric future.

The action plan not only showcases existing plant-based initiatives, including the Plant-Based Food Grant (the Plante-fonden)¹, but also underscores the country's growing commitment to making the plant-based transition more strategic, inclusive and scalable (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2024).



¹ "Subsidies from the Plant-Based Food Grant are allocated to projects that focus on the development of the plant-based food sector, so we can in the future benefit from Danish-produced, plant-based foods." (<https://plantefonden.dk/the-plant-based-food-grant/the-grant>)

Plant-based foods and plant-rich diets

In the Danish action plan, plant-based foods are defined broadly and constitute a cornerstone of the policy. At the same time, the action plan and many organisations emphasise that the goal is not simply to remove meat and dairy, but to make plants and plant-based foods a steadily larger share of what we eat. The foreword to the plant-based action plan, written by Jacob Jensen, captures this balanced approach:

“ There is competition for land use [...] it must provide a clean aquatic environment, develop renewable energy, increase nature and biodiversity, provide crops for food and feed, and deliver a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. And then there’s the impact of poor dietary habits on nutrition and health. Increasing the production and consumption of plant-based foods will help solve these challenges.

– Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2024.

This perspective frames the transition as a move toward a plant-rich diet: a dietary pattern where plant-based foods increasingly dominate the plate, without excluding animal-based products alto-

gether. This nuance has been crucial for building broad support for the transition, especially among stakeholders in conventional agriculture.

By avoiding an “all-or-nothing” framing, conventional agriculture has been able to engage constructively both in plant-based projects and through other complementary tracks. This balance is highlighted in AgriFoodTure’s 2021 national Roadmap.²

Alongside tracks on land-use management, innovation in biotechnological solutions, and animal-based food production, plant-based food production is highlighted as one of the main tracks toward a “green transition of the agri-food system.”

“ The term plant-based foods covers all foods derived from plants, as well as edible fungi, algae and nutritious microorganisms. Plant-based foods can also be combined with enzymes and other non-animal ingredients as long as they are suitable for human consumption.

– Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2024.

2 AgriFoodTure: Roadmap for sustainable transformation of the Danish agri-good system (2021): https://agrifoodture.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/agrifoodture_roadmap_2022.pdf

Plant-based initiatives and projects

Through a series of political, public and private actions, a set of plant-based initiatives has emerged to promote the shift towards more plant-rich consumption and production. They provide the organisational and financial framework within which a diverse range of plant-based projects, from product development to social acceptance campaigns, are carried out.

Today, numerous public and private organisations, foundations and programmes contribute to this agenda. Still, four stand out for their scope and influence: Plant2Food, AgriFoodTure, the

Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP), and the Plant-Based Food Grant.

Recognising the value of greater coordination and communication, and the potential to maximise impact across initiatives, four leading programmes: Plant2Food, AgriFoodTure, the Green Development and GUDP, and the Plant-Based Food Grant have united under the Fast-Forward Plant-Based Food Partnership. Backed by the Novo Nordisk Foundation, they aim to connect stakeholders, coordinate innovation efforts, and promote knowledge sharing.

What are plant-based initiatives?

In this report, we have defined plant-based initiatives as:

Strategic platforms or funding programmes established to accelerate the shift toward more sustainable, plant-rich diets by supporting projects and efforts that aim to develop and promote the adoption of plant-based solutions across the food system.

Initiatives are typically institutional in nature, such as mission-driven funding schemes or dedicated grant programmes. They serve as organising frameworks for a broad set of projects, activities, and collaborations. Thus,

they are structural enablers rather than the individual research or innovation projects supported by the initiatives.

Plant-based initiatives have multiple roles

- They coordinate and fund a portfolio of efforts that support the shift toward more sustainable, plant-rich diets and food systems.
- They define strategic priorities and mobilise resources.
- They bring together actors from research, industry, civil society, and government.

Scope of this white paper

This white paper examines Denmark's transition toward a plant-rich diet, with a specific focus on the role of Danish plant-based initiatives. While other tracks to reduce the climate and environmental impact of food consumption remain important, the analysis focuses mainly on the initiatives and projects that promote the development, production, and uptake of plant-based foods.

Through desk research, expert interviews, and project-level data analysis, the paper explores three overarching questions:

- What characterises the infra-structures and broader ecosystem in Denmark that support and promote the transition towards a more plant-based food system and an increasingly plant-rich diet?
- Which lessons can be drawn from the Danish experience in agri-food policy, particularly in the design, governance and implementation of plant-based and plant-rich initiatives?
- How can Denmark's approach to advancing a plant-rich diet and food system inform and inspire European policy development?

By highlighting successes, identifying friction points, and distilling lessons, the analysis contributes to both Denmark's ongoing transition and the European debate on a future Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods.



Methodology

This white paper applies a structured and pragmatic methodology. The research is built around four main components: 1) desk research and initiative and ecosystem mapping, 2) stakeholder interviews, 3) field participation, and 4) strategic synthesis.

Mapping of key Danish plant-based initiatives:

The first analytical step is a systematic mapping of key plant-based initiatives that support the plant-based transition in Denmark. This includes Plant2Food, AgriFoodTure, the Green Development and GUDP, and the Plant-Based Food Grant. Second, an overview of critical events in agri-food policy in Denmark and Europe is organised in a timeline. Complementing the national mapping are results from targeted desk research.

Interviews with key stakeholders:

To ground the research in practice, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse actors. Interviewees included plant-based initiative managers, project coordinators, academic researchers, policymakers, and representatives from industry and interest organisations. These interviews focused on governance models, collaboration mechanisms, enabling policy environ-

ments, success factors, and the potential for European-scale expansion.

Insights from the Fast-Forward Plant-Based Food Symposium 2025:

These insights helped validate preliminary findings and brought additional cases and perspectives into the analysis. Keynotes, panel discussions, and breakout sessions were transcribed and analysed, offering timely reflections on national coordination efforts and emerging momentum behind a European Action Plan for plant-based food systems.

Integrated synthesis and strategic recommendations:

Finally, findings from the mapping, interviews, and field observations were integrated into a cross-cutting synthesis. The analysis thus identifies illustrative examples of successful cross-sector collaboration, policy innovation, and institutional friction. It also highlights gaps and overlaps between Danish platforms and translates these into strategic insights. The resulting recommendations are designed to be actionable – relevant to both Danish stakeholders and European institutions seeking to accelerate a sustainable food system transformation.

Structure of the white paper

The first chapter offers an introduction to the agri-food policy landscape in Denmark and the EU. Initially, it provides an overview of Denmark's long-standing commitments, culminating in its 2023 plant-based action plan. The chapter also contains a summary of key agri-food policy developments at the European level since the adoption of the EU Green Deal.

In the second chapter, we describe the initiatives that fund and coordinate food-policy activities in Denmark. Here, each plant-based initiative – Plant2Food, Agri-FoodTure, the Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP), and the Plant-Based Food Grant – is profiled by its origins, governance structure, and strategic goals, alongside funding programmes that support plant-based projects. We also visualise the variety of projects and project partners focusing on the implementation, transformation, re-

search and development of plant-based solutions.

The third chapter presents an in-depth analysis of recent Danish agri-food policy and plant-based initiatives, drawing on expert interviews to surface both successes and challenges. We describe core analytical points regarding the factors in the Danish approach that have enabled progress and the friction.

Finally, the fourth chapter synthesises the lessons learned in Denmark and explores their relevance for a future European action plan on plant-based foods. By weaving in interview insights, we discuss how governance architectures, funding streams, and stakeholder engagement models can be adapted to the diverse political, cultural, and institutional contexts found across EU Member States.



Chapter 1



Plant-based policy landscape in Denmark and beyond

Over the past three decades, Denmark has steadily built a reputation as a global frontrunner in organic and plant-based food policy. This journey began with early support for organic agriculture. It matured into an explicit, politically championed commitment to plant-rich nutrition when, in 2023, Denmark became the first country worldwide to adopt a national plant-based action plan.

That plan set a binding objective to accelerate the transition toward a predominantly plant-based food system by coordinating research, investment, and market-development programmes under a unified strategic framework (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2024).

Alongside the national push for a plant-based transition, the Novo Nordisk Foundation declared in its strategy that:

“We need to change people’s diets so that alternative protein sources replace animal protein.”

A stance that practically excludes animal-based research from the largest private funding source in Denmark. Simultaneously, the foundation has invested heavily in alternative protein research.

Denmark’s example sits against a backdrop of rapidly growing, yet fragmented, global public investments in alternative

proteins. In 2024, governments worldwide announced roughly USD 510 million in new funding for research, development, and scaling of plant-based, fermented, and cultivated proteins, bringing the cumulative global public pledge to about USD 2.1 billion (GFI, 2025).

However, those investments remain heavily skewed toward early-stage research (TRL 1–3) and account for only a small fraction of the funds directed toward conventional animal agriculture. Without stronger national strategies and dedicated funding streams, alternative proteins and plant-based food products in general continue to compete at a disadvantage in heavily subsidised markets (Deloitte, 2023; GFI Europe, 2024).

Within the EU, calls for a coherent, continent-wide approach have intensified. In its “Plant Our Future” manifesto, the European Alliance for Plant-Based Foods (EAPF) urged EU institutions to adopt a dedicated action plan on plant-based foods by 2026, arguing that a unified policy could simultaneously address climate change, biodiversity loss, public health, and strategic autonomy (EAPF, 2024). Likewise, the European Commission’s 2024 strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture highlighted the need for mission-oriented governance – complete with clear targets, cross-sectoral coordination, and a European advisory board on agriculture and food – to overcome

the current patchwork of incentives and regulatory bottlenecks (European Commission, 2024).

Denmark's own policy landscape exemplifies both innovation and organisational fragmentation of support mechanisms. Alongside the plant-based action plan and the Plant-Based Food Grant, multiple flagship programmes – including Plant2Food, AgriFoodTure, the Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP) – each target different segments of the innovation chain, from basic research to market deployment (Vegetarian Society & Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2024).

A key characteristic of the Danish plant-based initiatives is the public-private partnership (PPP) model, which brings

together universities, startups, established firms, municipalities, NGOs, and citizens. This collaborative setup is not only widely embraced but also often required by funding programmes when allocating resources. It reflects a shared conviction: Sustainable transformation requires not only cutting-edge research but also alignment and mutual understanding among all actors along the food value chain.

The PPP model has also emerged as a unifying mechanism across Europe. In the Netherlands, for example, the master plan “Economically-Powered Protein Transition through Innovation in Chains” (EPPIC) has tightly integrated state agencies and private actors to steer research toward commercially viable outcomes (Wageningen University & Research, 2023).



Overview of Danish agri-food policy developments in the period 2003–2023

Over the past twenty years, Denmark's policy has evolved through four distinct phases: initially focusing on organic foods, and more recently, demonstrating a significant shift towards plant-based transformation.

Organic foundations (2003–2012)

While legislation on organic production and Denmark's first Organic Action Plan dates to 1987, a renewed effort was launched in 2011 in the form of the Danish Organic Action Plan 2020 (updated in 2015). It aimed to double the area under organic cultivation by 2020 from the 2007 level and to increase the procurement of organic food in all public kitchens in Denmark to 60% before 2020. (Sørensen, Lassen, Løje, & Tetens, 2015).

Already two years earlier, the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration had launched the Organic Cuisine Label for professional kitchens registered in the Danish food safety scheme. Its purpose was (and still is) to show employees and guests the extent to which the food and beverages sold are organic (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2023a).

Mainstreaming organic foods (2013–2018)

Following the Organic Action Plan 2020, the 2013 Danish Growth Plan for the food sector included efforts to strengthen organic product development and marketing among entrepreneurs (Danish Government, 2013).

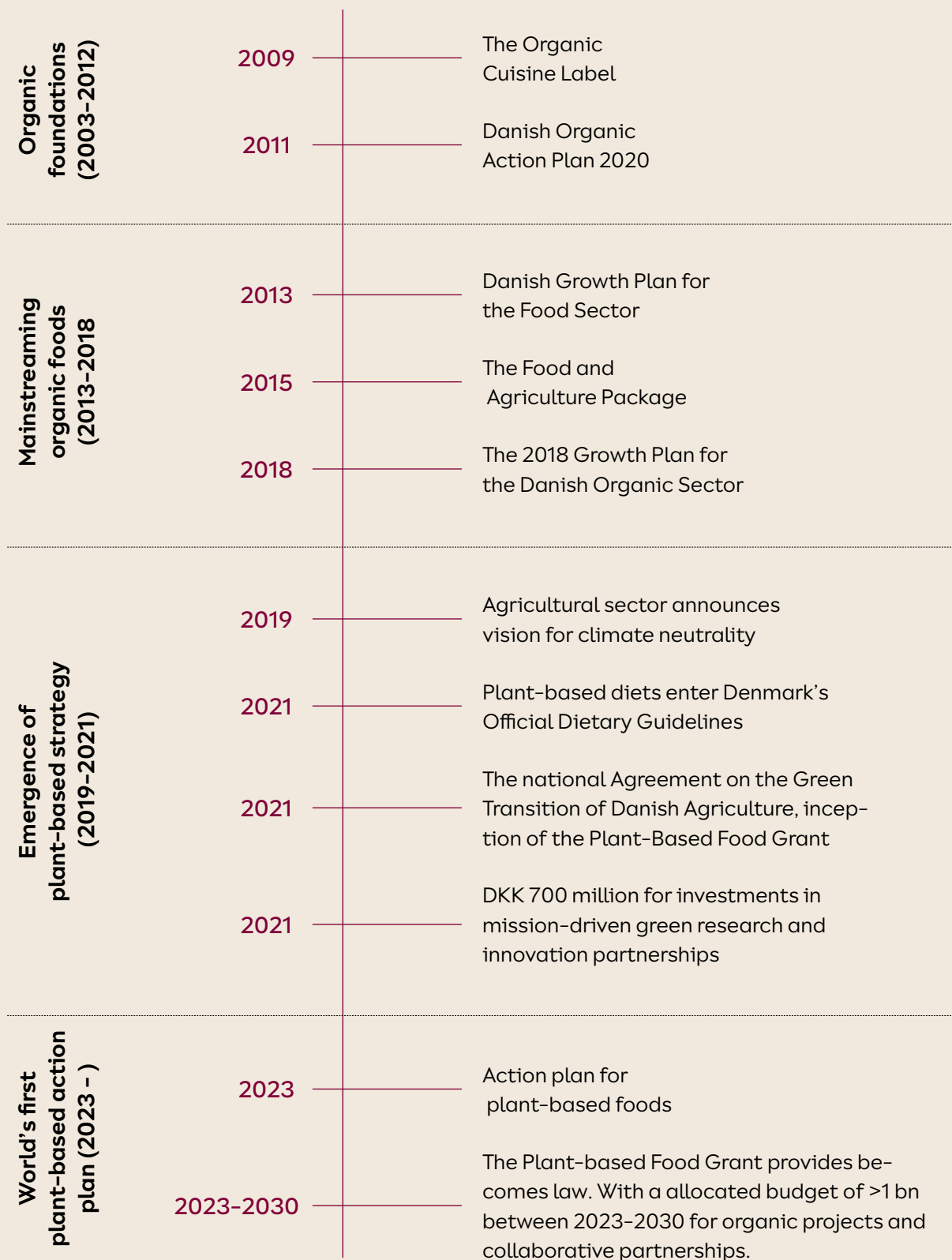
In late 2015, the Danish government adopted the Food and Agriculture Package, which promoted the organic food sector by earmarking significant funds for organic area aid and simplifying regulations for organic producers, among other measures (Danish Government, 2015).

Finally, the 2018 Growth Plan for the Danish organic sector included substantial measures, such as further investments, regulatory simplification, and expanding organic markets domestically and internationally.

The plan supported innovation and circular bioeconomy principles, while seeking market-driven growth through strong collaboration between government, farmers, and industry (Danish Ministry of Environment and Food, 2018).

Figur 1

Overview of Danish agri-food policy developments in the period 2003-2023



Emergence of a plant-based strategy (2019–2021)

The year 2019 represented a watershed moment for Danish climate policy, establishing the political, economic and social foundation that would later support plant-based food initiatives. Denmark experienced an unprecedented wave of climate protests, helping to make climate change a central issue in the 2019 general election and creating a broad political consensus around ambitious climate targets (Dullaghan, 2025).

At the same time, the Danish agriculture industry announced its vision to become carbon neutral by 2050, thus linking agricultural practices with climate objectives (Danish Agriculture & Food Council, 2019). In early 2021, Denmark's government began including explicit references to plant-based diets in its official dietary guidelines, relating reduced meat consumption to climate and health goals (Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, n.d.).

Later that year, the national Agreement on the Green Transition of Danish Agriculture announced several measures to position Denmark as a global leader in plant-based foods and green proteins. These included the development of an action plan for plant-based foods and dedicated funding for education, research, development, and production – most notably through the establishment of the Plant-Based Food Grant (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Den-

mark, 2021; The Plant-based Food Grant, 2025).

Also, in 2021, the Danish government and parliament allocated DKK 700 million to support mission-driven green research and innovation partnerships to achieve Denmark's ambitious climate targets: a 70% reduction by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050.

Innovation Fund Denmark requested roadmaps within four mission areas. One of the four selected roadmaps used to create a second call was the AgriFood-Ture Roadmap. The roadmap describes a set of complementary tracks within agriculture and food that should work towards the climate targets. The roadmap and the white paper creation process involved collaboration and deliberation between a broad set of national stakeholders from various types of organisations. Through workshops and consultations, the actors had the opportunity to engage in the development of the resulting roadmap.

World's first action plan on plant-based foods (2023)

On 13 October 2023, Denmark published its Action Plan on Plant-Based Foods, the first national action plan of its kind. Emerging from the 2021 Agreement on the Green Transition of Agriculture, the plan forms part of a broader set of initiatives aimed at driving the green transition of Denmark's agricultural and food sectors. Alongside related strategies for

green proteins for human and animal consumption, for organic production, and for technical greenhouse gas reduction potentials (as well as initiatives such as the Strategy for Green Jobs in Agriculture and Related Industries, the Bioeconomy Panel, and the Task Force on Vertical Farming), the plan contributes to the shared goal of reducing agricultural emissions while promoting sustainable growth and innovation.

It establishes ambitious targets across the entire value chain, including increasing plant-based food sales in retail, strengthening export initiatives through embassies and the Food Nation branding programme, and enhancing domestic raw material production through targeted subsidies and development programmes.

At the institutional level, the action plan prioritises promoting plant-based foods in public kitchens, alongside private restaurants, canteens, and food services, while implementing comprehensive chef training programmes through both formal culinary education and the labour-market education system (AMU).

The plan's research and development component focuses on establishing strategic public-private partnerships among government, universities, and industry, with particular emphasis on organic crop diversification and innovative food processing technologies. Implementation is supported by the Plant-Based Food

Grant, which provides DKK 1 billion from 2023 to 2030 (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2023).

A constantly developing policy area (2024 onward)

In 2024, the Green Tripartite (Den Grønne Trepert) – a collaboration between the Danish government and key stakeholders in agriculture and nature – reached a landmark agreement: the Agreement on a Green Denmark. This agreement seeks to deliver more nature, cleaner water, and a sustainable transformation of agriculture.

The tripartite model is notable for its novelty: instead of policy being shaped solely by government, it is negotiated directly among state, industry, and civil society, ensuring shared ownership of outcomes. Among its many results, the agreement secured the Plant-Based Food Grant as a permanent funding scheme and reinforced Denmark's position as a global frontrunner in sustainable food policy.

Denmark's development in food and agricultural policy provides a unique case study of how sustained political will, public-private collaboration, and inclusive negotiation can transform both supply and demand to support sustainable, plant-rich diets. It also illustrates how incremental policy innovation can lead to a complex of initiatives, policies, and funds – creating various challenges that require specific efforts to address.

European agri-food policy landscape

The announcement of the European Green Deal in December 2019 established sustainability as the overarching framework for all major EU policy areas. With the ultimate goal of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050, it led to a range of key initiatives aiming to integrate environmental and health objectives into agriculture and food-system policies (European Parliament, 2020; European Council, 2025a).

Developed as a central component of the Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy represents a comprehensive attempt to integrate health and sustainability objectives across the entire food value chain. Announced in May 2020, the strategy articulates an ambitious vision to make the European food system fair, healthy and environmentally friendly – for instance, by reducing GHG emissions and ensuring food security, nutrition and public health for all. As noted earlier, the Farm to Fork Strategy explicitly emphasises the benefits of shifting towards a more plant-based diet with less red meat and processed meat. Such dietary changes are expected to reduce risks of life-threatening diseases among consumers, while also contributing to an improved environmental performance of the food system (European Commission, 2020).

In line with the Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy, the EU's 2021 Organic Action Plan aims to boost both the production and consumption of organic food

across the European Union, targeting 25% of EU agricultural land for organic farming by 2030. The plan is structured around three interconnected axes: stimulating consumer demand and trust, encouraging farmer conversion while reinforcing the entire value chain, and improving organic farming's contribution to environmental sustainability.

It encompasses a wide range of specific actions that include promoting organic food consumption through public procurement and school schemes, supporting farmers' conversion to organic practices, and dedicating at least 30% of the research and innovation budget in agriculture to organic-relevant topics (European Commission, 2021).



At the end of 2021, the EU formally adopted the latest reform of its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period 2023–2027. It entered into force at the start of 2023 and focuses on making agriculture greener, more equitable, and more sustainable.

It introduces stricter environmental rules and greater flexibility, allowing each Member State to tailor its own support and measures. The CAP reform notably increases support for protein crops — primarily for animal feed — and for legumes, which are recognised for their environmental and climate benefits, through targeted economic incentives.

A key feature is the introduction of eco-schemes: voluntary payments that incentivise farmers to adopt climate-friendly and biodiversity-enhancing practices, such as organic farming or restoring natural habitats (European Commission, n.d.; Mastrodomenico, 2024; European Council, 2025b).

Between January and September 2024, the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture brought together a range of key stakeholders from across the entire agri-food value chain, including farmers, agri-food businesses, co-operatives, rural communities, NGOs, financial institutions and academia.

The forum's final report emphasises the need for significant changes to EU agri-food policies; for instance, it recom-

mends reform of the CAP. A reform that shifts focus from area-based payments to income support and performance-based payments for environmental and climate actions. It also includes recommendations for a stronger organic sector and a shift to more plant-centred, healthy and sustainable diets in the EU (European Commission, 2024).

Building on the Strategic Dialogue report, the European Commission published its Vision for Agriculture and Food in February 2025. It represents the EU's roadmap to a longterm competitive and sustainable EU farming and food sector by 2040, aiming to make agriculture an appealing career for future generations while maintaining Europe's leadership in global food markets. The roadmap emphasises simplifying regulations and economic sustainability over environmental targets, for instance, by moving away from some reduction targets set out in the Farm to Fork Strategy, such as halving pesticide use by 2030. It focuses on four priorities: making farming attractive with fair incomes, ensuring competitiveness and resilience, creating a future-proof sector that supports climate goals, and valuing food and rural communities (European Commission, 2025; Fortuna & Lory, 2025).

However, the Commission's vision notably lacks new measures targeting organic farming and plant-based foods, thus relying on existing mechanisms and policy frameworks.

In particular, the vision papers' approach to plant-based foods has sparked considerable criticism from various stakeholder groups. The European Alliance for Plant-Based Foods (EAPF), for example, argues that the EU roadmap fails to adopt a system-based perspective and overlooks the need for a comprehensive EU strategy for plant-based foods, even though this was explicitly recommended by the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture. While the EAPF recognises that the vision paper mentions the issue of protein diversification, they believe this focus is too narrow. As a result, the EAPF is advocating for a wider food system transition plan that sets out clear objectives and policy incentives to encourage a shift toward more sustainable diets (EAPF, 2025).

Shortly before the publication of the EU's roadmap, more than 130 stakeholder organisations, representing farmers and consumers as well as environmen-

tal, health and animal welfare interests, had urged the European Commission to include an Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods. In a joint statement, they argued for a comprehensive, well-funded action plan that would boost both the production and consumption of plant-based foods across the agri-food chain, support farmers (especially organic and agroecological), help meet health, climate, and protein self-sufficiency goals, and ensure that plant-based options are affordable and accessible for all consumers (European Environmental Bureau, 2025).

While Denmark has laid the foundations for a balanced, collaborative path to reducing the climate impacts of food production and consumption, Europe's approach remains less specific. Signals from organisations and Commission communications point to a possible action plan, yet recent developments indicate a slower pace and a trajectory still taking shape.





Chapter 2

Denmark's plant-based innovation infrastructure

In its 2023 Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods, the Danish government set out a clear ambition: to accelerate the shift towards plant-rich diets through a coordinated, innovation-driven ecosystem.

The plan emphasises three delivery tracks: stimulating supply, stimulating demand, and building bridges across the food system. It identifies two primary instruments to deliver on this ambition: the Plant-Based Food Grant and the Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP).

Alongside these, Denmark's broader policy and innovation landscape includes two additional platforms, Plant2Food and Agri-FoodTure, which, although not explicitly referenced in the action plan, are acknowledged and integrated in accompanying political agreements and national roadmaps.

Together, these four initiatives represent an institutional core of Denmark's plant-based transition. Each supports distinct segments of the innovation chain — from foundational science to market-ready solutions — using different approaches to funding plant-based projects:

Plant-Based Food Grant

A grant programme exceeding one billion DKK in funding (2021–2030), the Plant-Based Food Grant was established before the adoption of the National Action Plan

and originally defined around three strategic tracks: supply, demand, and systemic coordination. While these tracks were developed independently, they have since been aligned as far as possible with the draft action plan to ensure coherence between funding priorities and national policy objectives. A multi-stakeholder board of directors manages the programme to ensure alignment with national priorities, with the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries providing secretarial support.

Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP)

A long-standing public R&D programme focused on the development and demonstration of green technologies, which support plant-based demonstration and development through its main call as well as through targeted programmes.

Plant2Food

Launched in 2023 by the Novo Nordisk Foundation to fill a critical gap at low TRL levels. The initiative organises and facilitates ideation and matchmaking activities to promote early-stage co-creation between academia and industry. The programme is rooted in the open innovation in science principles and funds pre-competitive, open, and IP-free research into plant-based foods and ingredients, including structure, chemistry, taste and health effects.

AgriFoodTure

Established in 2021 as part of Denmark's broader food innovation strategy. The AgriFoodTure partnership unites universities, knowledge and innovation institutions, SMEs, and large national and international companies, as well as civil society actors and authorities, in a shared vision for Danish agricultural and food production.

In June 2025, Food & Bio Cluster Denmark (FBCD)³ and AgriFoodTure merged to form a single non-profit association dedicated to strengthening innovation and sustainability in the food and bioresource sectors. The mission of the new organisation is *to position Denmark as a global frontrunner in the green and sustainable transition of future food systems and bioresources* (AgriFoodTure, 2025).

The new organisation unites actors within food and bioresources under one umbrella, aiming to create a unified entry point to Denmark's innovation landscape. Among the stated goals is to simplify access to funding and guidance. In addition to these targeted initiatives, several broader funding instruments within the Danish research, innovation, and business development system also support plant-based research and innovation. These include Innovation Fund Denmark (Innovationsfonden) and the Independent Research Fund Denmark (Danmarks

Frie Forskningsfond, DFF), which provide grants through general calls across disciplines. While plant-based themes are occasionally funded, they are not a central strategic priority nor a formal selection criterion, and support is typically provided in an ad hoc fashion.

Similarly, the Foundation for Organic Farming (Fonden for Økologisk Landbrug) and an excise duty fund for agriculture (Promilleafgiftsfonden for Landbrug) contribute to plant-based development, particularly where it overlaps with organic production, sustainability, or export promotion.

Finally, the Danish business development board also supports a range of activities and organisations in the agri-food sector relevant to the plant-based transition. In combination, the Danish research, innovation, and business development system forms an ecosystem where a blend of specialised and broad instruments supports both radical innovation and incremental improvements across the plant-based value chain. As is illustrated in Chapter 2, each programme brings together a distinct set of actors around specific objectives. Therefore, each initiative or programme activates different parts of the ecosystem in the shared aim of promoting a plant-rich diet in Denmark.

³ Food and Bio cluster is funded by the Danish business development board. They organize and support developments within small and medium sized companies and bridges, companies, NGOs and Industry organisations.

Table 1

Plant-Based Initiatives and Other Relevant Funders

Programme	Main Mission	Instruments	Partner and project eligibility/ requirements
Plant2Food	To accelerate the transition to a more sustainable, plant-based food system, which is healthy for both the planet and its population by building a leading hub for plant-based food research and innovation.	Networking, ideation, pitching, matchmaking and funding of open, pre-competitive, IP-free research projects.	Open science, no patenting: Focus on datasets, methods, assays.
AgriFoodTure	Power a new generation of green export opportunities, securing the climate, environment and biodiversity while safeguarding food production and employment.	Collaborative, mission-driven innovation and knowledge generation projects.	Collaborative R&D; impact-based; pilots and scaling demonstrations.
GUDP	Promote a Danish food production system that is climate neutral, respects nature, the environment and animal welfare, while also being profitable and producing healthy, safe, and tasty foods.	Demonstration and development projects.	LCA, business plans required; commercial validation and demonstration.
Plant-based Food Grant	Plant-based foods shall play a meaningful role in benefiting the development of the food industry and the health of people and the planet.	Plant-based projects within knowledge transfer, advisory services, research, development, cultivation, processing, and promotional efforts for plant-based foods, including participation in quality schemes. Within “supply”, “demand”, and “building sectoral bridges”.	Competitive calls in three tracks: Strong cross-sector collaboration, demonstration of concepts, and learning outcomes.
Danish Council for Independent Research (DFF)	Research funding for scientific excellence.	Research grants.	Peer review; bottom-up; occasional plant-based relevance.
Innovation Fund Denmark	Applied research and innovation with commercial scaling.	Innovation projects grants.	Consortia; market orientation; focus on new-to-market innovation and export potential.

Analysis of plant-based projects

For this report, Danish Tehnological Insti-tute collected and analysed project data from funders' open databases and web-sites. This work was performed between June–July.

Over the past four years, we were able to identify 161 plant-based projects in Denmark, amounting to a total of DKK 551 million in funding for Danish organi-sations.

After the completion of the analysis, we were made aware of an additional nine The Plant-Based Food Grant projects granted in 2013 and 2014 with a start date in 2014 or 2015, that the data collec-tion had not captured.

Furthermore, 45 projects were granted in 2025 for a total amount of 213,5 Million DKK. Since projects granted in 2025 do not begin until 2026 these do not appear in the analysis of this chapter. Nor do the 9 projects from 2023 and 2024, that unfortunately where not captured in the data collection in June and July.

The figures and tables represent only the sample of projects compiled in June and July.

Projects and associated funding are counted in the year the project officially begins, which often can differ from the year the grant is awarded.

Table 2 presents the annual number of plant-based projects and the total amounts granted (in million DKK) re-ceived by Danish organisations from 2022 to 2025 among the identified pro-jects.

The analysis points to a clear upward trend in targeted investment, with both the number of projects and total budgets increasing markedly from 2022 to 2024. The 2025 figures exclude European grants and many awards that had not yet been reported at the time of data collection, suggesting that the final totals for 2025 are likely to exceed previous years.

The grants from The Plant-Based Food Grant (213.5 million DKK) awarded in 2025 will alone mean that trend with cer-tainty will continue upwards In 2026 and exceed the total of 2025..

Table 2

Annual number of initiated plant-based projects and total granted amounts (in million DKK) received by Danish organisations from 2022 to 2025. By year of project initiation.

Start year	2022	2023	2024	2025*	Total
Plant-based projects	32	50	64	15	161
Amount received (million DKK)**	76	141	255	78	551

Note: *Data collected in June-July 2025, and 2025 do not include European grants. ** The total budget is calculated as the sum of funding for plant-based projects received by Danish organisations through Danish initiatives and programmes and Horizon Europe. Start year is equivalent to the year where project activities begin – this may often be in the year after the grant is awarded.

After the completion of the analysis, we were made aware of an additional nine Plant-Based Food Grant projects awarded in 2013 and 2014 with a start date in 2014 or 2015, that the data collection had not captured. These are not included in the calculation of project numbers or amount, to ensure consistency.

Source: Danish Technological Institute (2025)

Between 2022 and 2024, Danish organisations also participated in European projects under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe with a combined total project budget of DKK 1,026,841,202.10. Of this amount, approximately DKK 90 million was awarded directly to Danish partners in their roles as coordinators or project partners.

Consequently, around 85% of plant-based projects involving Danish actors have been funded through plant-based initiatives based in Denmark. The four plant-based initiatives forming the Fast-Forward Partnership account for

DKK 429 million – equivalent to 78% of all funding for plant-based projects among the analysed projects. While the remaining 7% comes from the Independent Research Fund Denmark and Innovation Fund Denmark.

Not included in Figure 3 is the Pioneer Center for Landscape Research in Sustainable Agricultural Futures, supported by the Danish National Research Foundation in 2022 with a DKK 240 million grant. Although not a dedicated plant-based initiative, it is reasonable to expect that a portion of its research activities will focus on plant-based topics.

It is important to note that these numbers inform us about the level and development of activity in this essential part of transitioning to a more plant-based diet in Denmark: plant-based projects.

This analysis focuses specifically on funding for dedicated plant-based projects that could be identified through funders' websites and databases. However, there are many other initiatives and programmes aimed at improving the environmental and climate footprint of food production and consumption.

For instance, AgriFoodTure supports a wide range of projects that seek to enhance the resource efficiency of animal-based food production, as well as initiatives exploring how to minimise the overall environmental impact of food systems. Similarly, within Innovation Fund Denmark, GUDP, and MUDP, numerous projects test, demonstrate, and evaluate economic, technological, societal, and practical solutions designed to reduce the adverse effects of food production and consumption and promote more sustainable approaches across the agri-food sector.

Plant-based projects' value chain focus and distance to market

Figure 2 positions each identified project along two analytical dimensions: the horizontal axis represents the project's value chain focus, ranging from supply-side innovation to transitional and demand-side measures, while the vertical axis shows its expected distance to market—that is, how close it is anticipated to be to application or market entry by the end of its funding period.

Each project is represented by a single dot, with dot size corresponding to total grant amount and colour indicating the funding programme. Larger dots in the upper parts of the chart thus represent substantial investments in projects nearing commercial readiness, while smaller dots lower down reflect early-stage or exploratory work.

Taken together, the distribution shows that Denmark's plant-based innovation portfolio spans the full spectrum from early research to near-market deployment. The figure highlights both the breadth of activity and the concentration of investment in areas that bridge research and application—indicating a system that is at once diverse and strategically oriented toward practical outcomes.

Table 3 complements this picture by showing the most frequent thematic focus areas among projects starting

between 2022 and 2025 (2022–2024 for Horizon projects). Across initiatives, the dominant themes are ingredient innovation, product development, and value chain development, together accounting for the majority of projects. These topics are particularly prevalent in the supply- and mid-range segments of Figure 2, reflecting a continued emphasis on strengthening Denmark's technological and industrial base for plant-based production.

By contrast, fewer projects address demand-side innovation or systemic transition themes—such as consumer behaviour, education, value chain development or public procurement—but these are growing areas, supported through projects funded through the Plant-Based Food Grant and AgriFoodTure initiatives. Their presence, though smaller in scale, signals an emerging interest and available funding for tackling societal and behavioural aspects of the plant-based shift.

Overall, the landscape suggests a balanced but strategically weighted distribution of effort and funding: the bulk of investment remains concentrated in developing ingredients, processes, and products, while targeted initiatives are beginning to expand the focus toward social and market-oriented dimensions of the transition.

Figur 2

Distribution of Projects by Value Chain Focus and Expected Distance to Market of Outcome



Note: Each project is positioned along two axes: (1) Expected distance to market (end of project) - indicating how close the project is expected to be to application or market use by the end of its funding period; and (2) Dominant value chain focus — categorising projects as primarily addressing supply, demand, or functioning as a bridge between the two. While many projects target more than one segment of the value chain, each project is represented by a single point for visual clarity. The position is based on the “average” of subcategories the project has been categorized in (subcategories in supply-side [1], transitional [2] and Demand-side [3]). Dot size reflects the total grant amount, and colour indicates the funding programme.

Table 3

Key Thematic focus Areas in Funded Plant-Based projects

Initiative	Most frequent topic	2 nd most frequent topic	3 rd most frequent topic	4 th most frequent topic
AgriFoodTure	Ingredient Innovation (24%)	Product Development (21%)	Value Chain Development (12 %)	Processing Technology (10%)
DFF	Ingredient Innovation (35%)	Product Development (21%)	Processing Technology (12%)	Nutrition and Health (9 %)
Horizon Europe	Value Chain Development (18 %)	Product Development (15 %)	Ingredient Innovation (14 %)	Protein Transition Strategy (9%); Innovation Ecosystem(9%); Consumer Education / Food literacy (9%)
GU DP	Product Development (24 %)	Agricultural systems (16 %)	Ingredient Innovation (16 %)	Circularity (13 %)
Innovation Fund Denmark	Product Development (31%)	Ingredient Innovation (27%)	Value Chain Development (12 %)	Circularity (10 %)
Plant2food	Ingredient Innovation (46%)	Product Development (31%)	Processing Technology (15%)	Nutrition and Health (4 %)
The Plant-Based Food Grant	Consumer Education / Food literacy (26 %)	Value Chain Development (12%)	Cultural and Social Perception (11 %)	Public Procurement / Food Environments (10 %); Behavioral Change and Diet Transition (10 %)

Note: The figure contains the four most recurring themes of plant-based projects under each initiative from 2022–2025 (2022–2024 for Horizon projects). The coding is performed by Technological institute, and a project can contain up to five topics. Dark shaded areas are topics related to supply side innovation, lightly shaded relate to demand-side innovation and the medium shade refers to bridging or systems topics. The topics, are applied irrespective of TRL level. Eeg. Product development focus in a project can be at very different stages of development (ideation versus commercialiation). Average TRL level is based on a combination of judgments from Teknologial institute after reading titles and abstracts and the projects’ or initiatives own assessments of TRL level.

As outlined in the introduction, a defining feature of the four dedicated plant-based initiatives is their use of a **public-private partnership model**. The design of their funding calls typically encourages – or requires – coalition building and collaboration across a diverse set of actors.

This contrasts with programmes such as **DFF**, which primarily fund individual researchers and academic projects, and **Innovationsfonden**, which maintains a more mixed portfolio across funding instruments.

Table 4

Composition and collaboration in funded plant-based projects

Programme	Projects	Collaborative	Organisations from at least two domains
AgriFoodTure	11	11	11
Research Fund Denmark	10	2	0
Horizon Europe	24	21	20
GUDP	20	20	20
Innovation Fund Denmark	21	9	9
Plant2food	12	12	12
The Plant-Based Food Grant	62	33	24
Total	161	109	94

Note: The figure summarises plant-based projects funded in 2022–2025 across programmes. Collaborative refers to projects with two or more partners. At least two societal actors cover projects involving participants from at least two domains (e.g., companies, research institutions, NGOs, industry organisations, or public authorities). Three or more societal actors indicates a broader mix across three or more domains. Categorisation is based on project descriptions and participant lists coded by the Danish Technological Institute.

A total of 617 unique organisations (182 Danish organisations) have been involved in the identified plant-based projects. 302 Private companies, 180 universities and research organizations, 61 NGOs and civil society actors, 53 industry organizations and 21 government bodies and municipalities, have been involved in the 161 identified plant-based projects.

Of the 161 identified projects funded between 2022-2025, 109 were collaborative in nature (involved two or more partners). 58% of projects involved at least two different organisational types (eg. University, Private companies, NGOs and Civil Society, Government etc.)

The most typical collaboration pattern is between research organisations and private companies, although, each funding instrument tends to activate different constellations of partners.

Notably, the Plant-Based Food Grant projects more frequently include NGOs,

government bodies, and civil society groups, reflecting a broader societal engagement.

The most frequent type of collaboration in the Plant-Based Food Grant has been between industry organisations and NGOs and civil society. In terms of activating NGOs and civil society the Plant-Based Food Grant projects include at least one of these actors in 29 out of 62 projects.

The Horizon Europe projects also include civil society actors in every other project. The important distinction, however, is that there are often very large consortia in the European projects whereas the Plant-Based Food Grant projects often include these actors as primary partners rather than one of many. In contrast, DFF projects are strictly university-based, focusing on academic research without formal cross-sector collaboration.

The organisational network of the plant-rich transition in Denmark

Understanding who collaborates with whom provides valuable insight into how Denmark's plant-based innovation system functions in practice.

Mapping organisational participation across projects reveals not only the individual actors but also the patterns of connection that link them—showing where research, industry, and public initiatives intersect, and where new or under-connected areas may emerge.

A network perspective highlights central brokers bridging sectors, clusters of repeated collaboration that signal established partnerships, and peripheral entrants that indicate renewal and diversification.

Figure 3 illustrates these dynamics.

Panel A shows the complete collaboration network based on participation in plant-based projects that began in years 2022–2025, while Panels B–F present zoom-ins on individual funding programmes, each highlighting the organisations and connections activated within

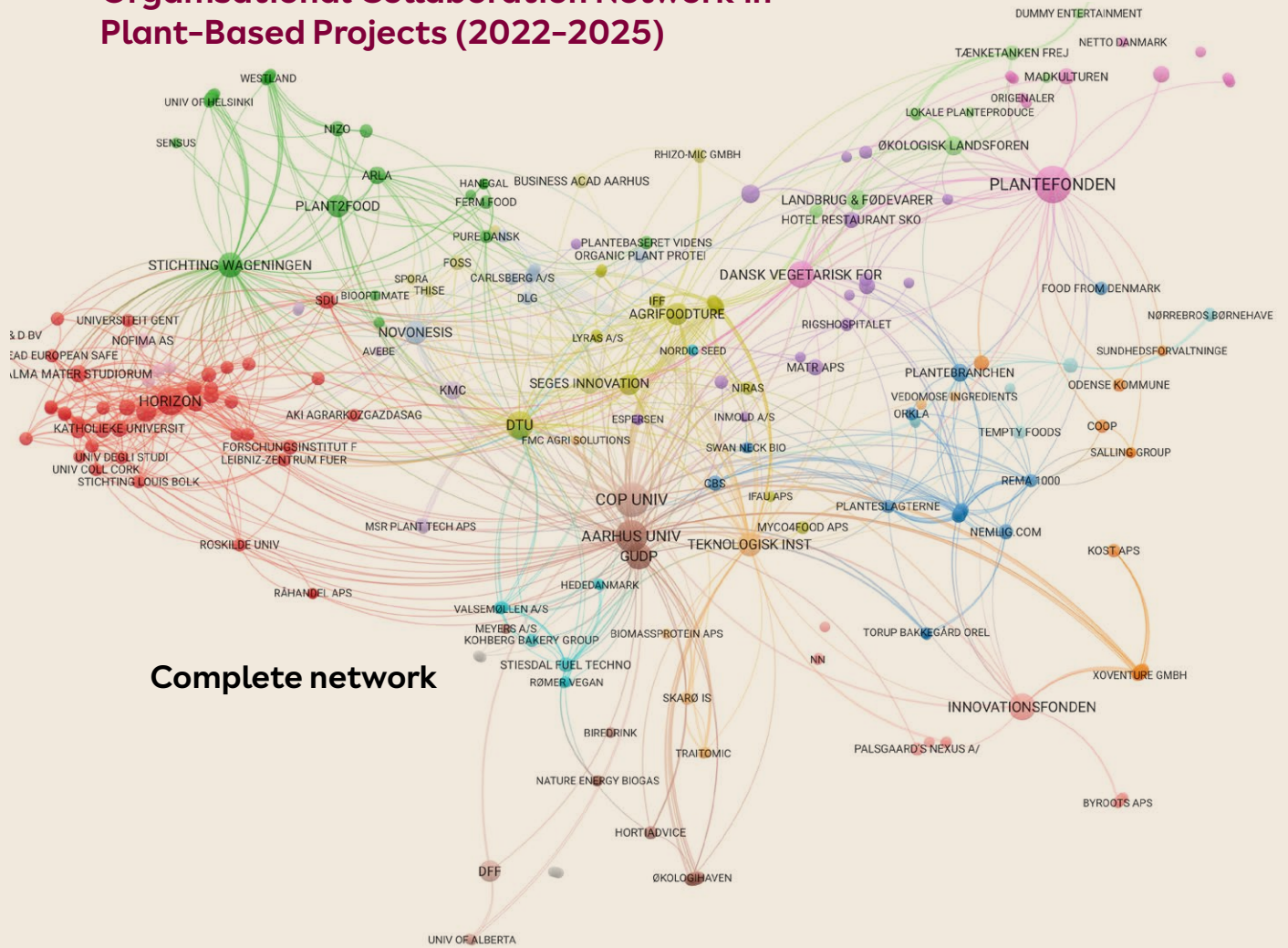
that specific instrument. Not all organisations are labelled in the figure—many appear only as smaller nodes—but their positions and linkages contribute to the overall structure. The following section describes the main patterns visible in these maps, focusing on the distinctive collaboration profiles associated with each programme and their links to the broader Danish and European research landscape.

The complete network reveals a dense, interconnected core anchored by major Danish universities (KU, AU, DTU, AAU) alongside key intermediary and industrial actors such as Arla, Novonesis, FOSS, SEGES Innovation, and the Danish Technological Institute. These organisations appear across multiple programmes, acting as pivotal bridges between research, industry, and applied innovation.

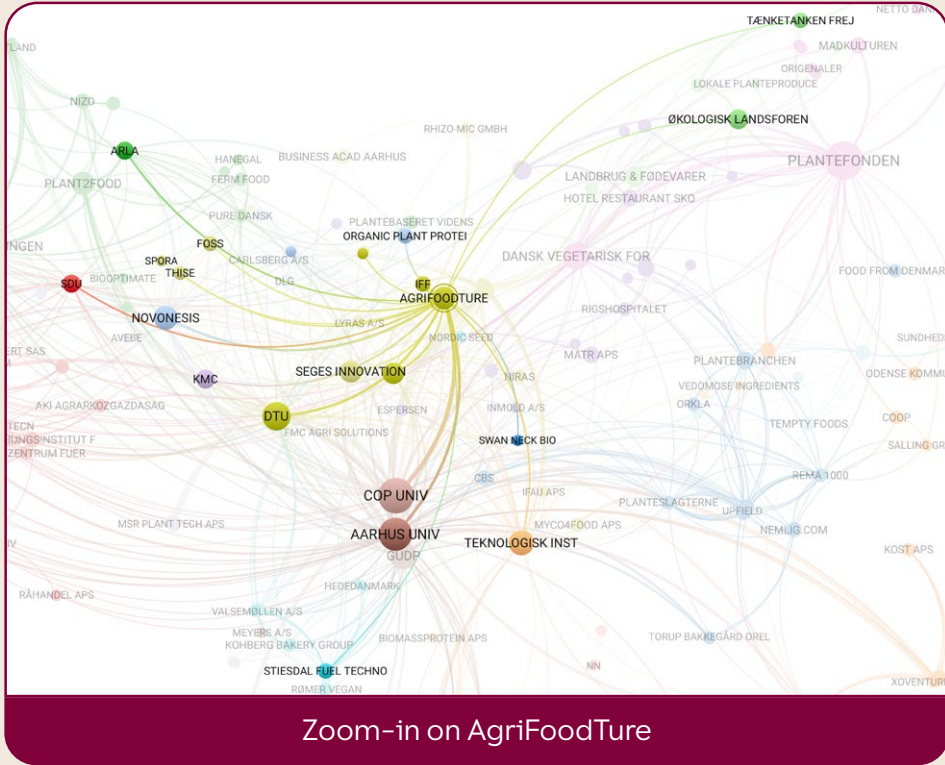
While these central actors recur across the network, each Danish funding programme also activates a particular subset of partners and characteristic collaboration pattern:

Figur 3

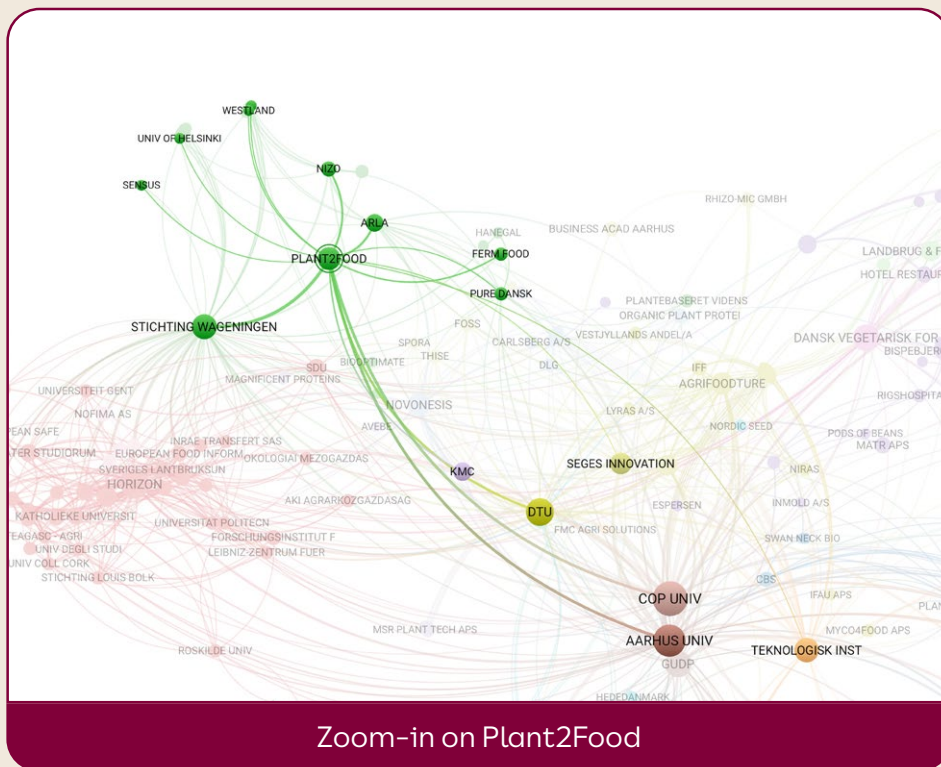
Organisational Collaboration Network in Plant-Based Projects (2022-2025)



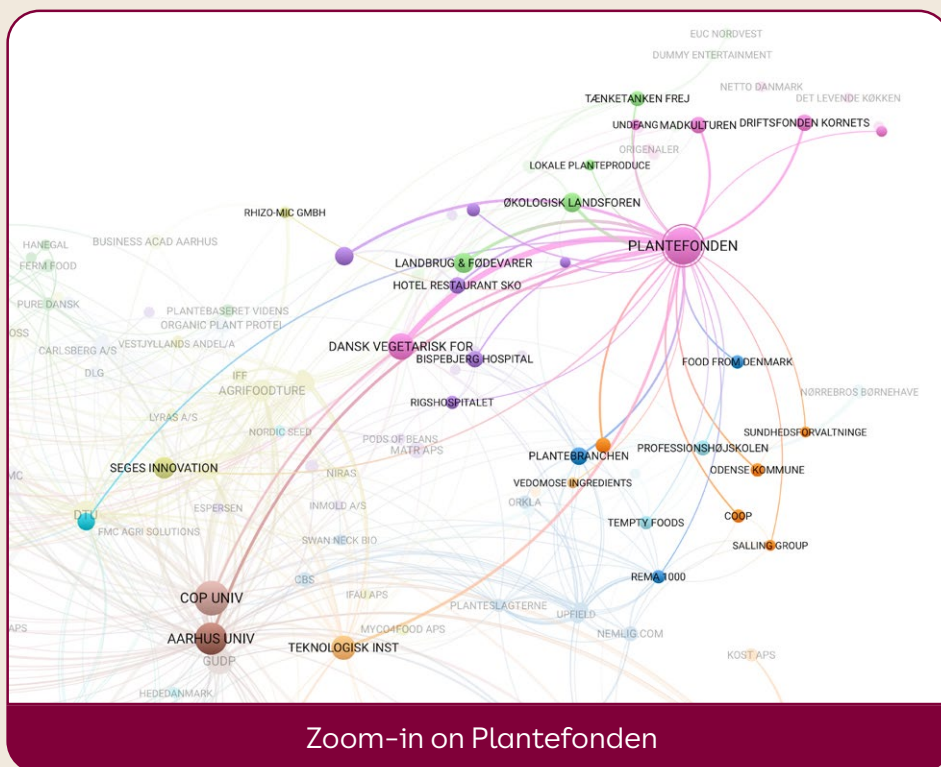
Complete network



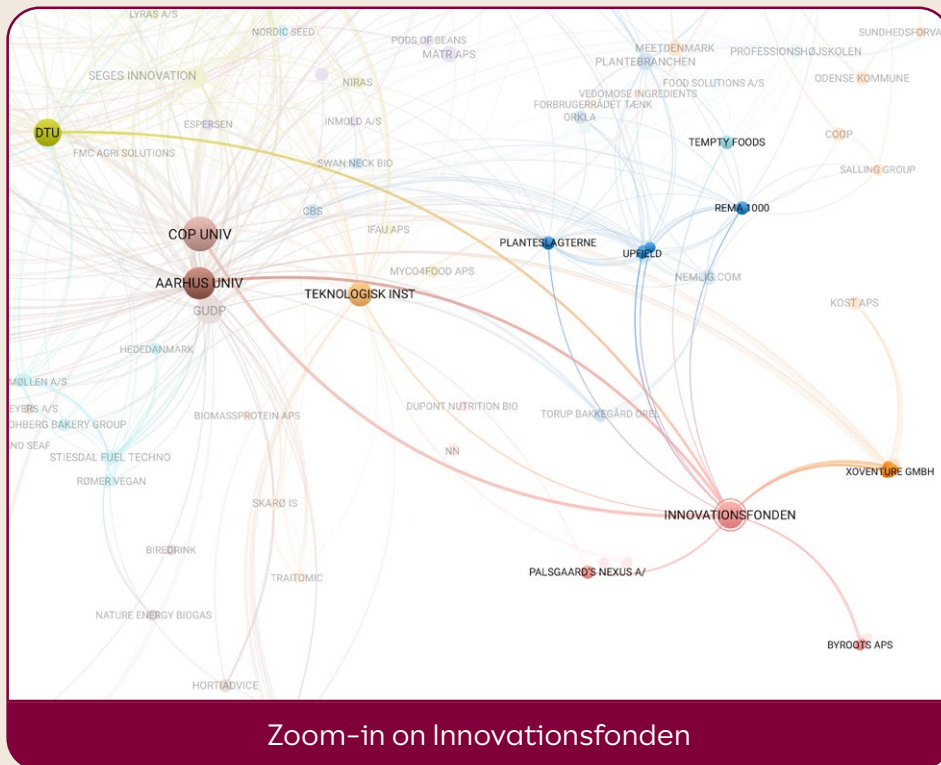
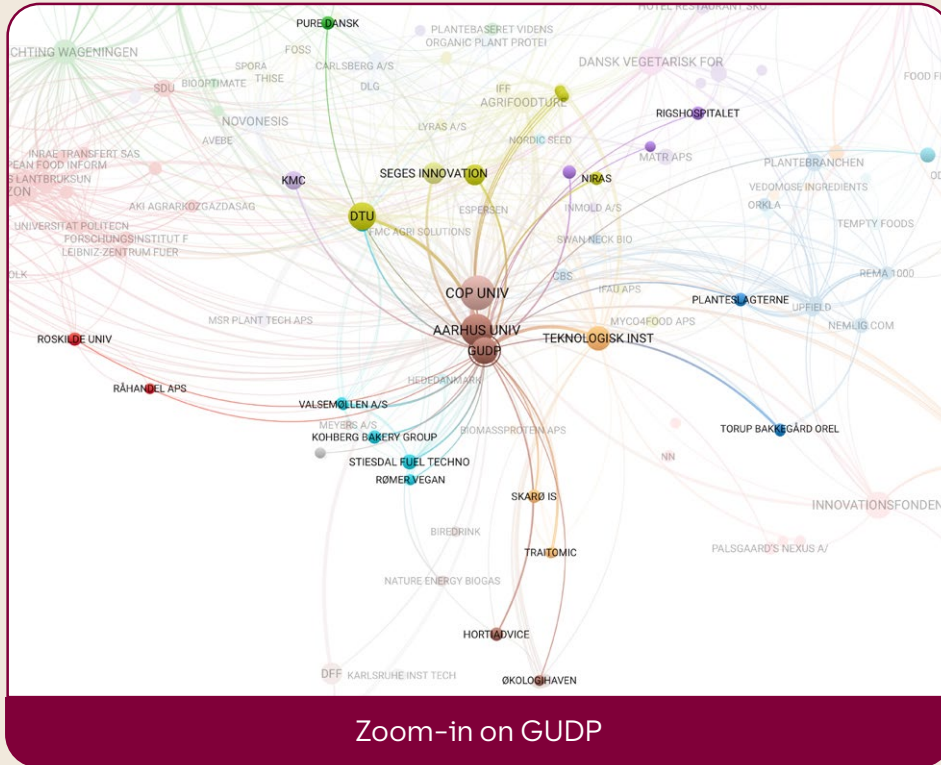
Zoom-in on AgriFoodTure



Zoom-in on Plant2Food



Zoom-in on PlanteFonden



Note: The complete network (A) shows the organisational collaboration network across plant-based projects from 2022–2025. Each zoom-in (B–F) focuses on a specific funding programme, highlighting all project connections involving organisations from that programme to illustrate its collaboration landscape and cross-programme links. Circle size indicates how often an organisation participates across projects. Lines connect partners appearing together in one or more projects. All organisations are included, with the exception of those appearing solely in Horizon projects with no participation in other programmes. Colours indicate collaboration clusters identified using VOSviewer, grouping organisations that share similar partners. Follow the link to explore the collaboration network in more detail <https://app.vosviewer.com/?json=https%3A%2F%2Fdrive.google.com%2Fuc%3Fid%3D1AYTM-52yMLKb89T9EZmhSQjG3klM2y1d>. Source: Danish Technological Institute

Plant2Food forms a compact, research-intensive cluster linking universities with firms such as Arla, Novonesis, and FOSS. The strong internal connectivity reflects its precompetitive, open-collaboration model, which consolidates ties among established R&D actors.

AgriFoodTure spans a wide range of academic and industrial partners, centred around universities and major food-sector companies. It connects closely with intermediary actors showing its role as a key national integrator rather than an international bridge.

Plantefonden mobilises a broad mix of smaller firms, NGOs, and civil-society actors that are otherwise peripheral to the ecosystem. Its more diffuse structure expands the network's societal reach and introduces new participants that rarely appear in the other programmes.

GUDP displays a strong applied orientation, linking research institutions with agricultural producers and technology developers. The pattern suggests a focus on practical implementation and value-chain innovation, with ties extending toward production and processing actors.

Innovationsfonden connects several of the large, established organisations that also appear in other programmes. Rather

than forming a distinct cluster, it reinforces existing, high-value partnerships across academia and industry, supporting continuity in Denmark's innovation landscape.

On the left-hand side, in the complete network in figure 3, a distinct red cluster represents Horizon-funded international projects.

This group contains mainly non-Danish organisations—such as Wageningen University & Research and other European partners—that connect into the Danish ecosystem primarily through the large universities. The structure shows that international collaboration flows through a narrow set of national gateways, highlighting how Danish universities serve as the main points of entry to European research consortia.

Taken together, these structures show a cohesive but differentiated ecosystem. A relatively small set of central organisations ensures stability and international visibility, while the diversity of national programmes allows different parts of the plant-based value chain—from research and technology to production and market application—to be activated and connected.



Chapter 3

A thick white curved line starts from the top left corner and curves downwards and to the right, ending near the bottom right corner. The background is a solid dark blue color.

Lessons from practice: enablers, challenges, and insights

Over the past decade, Denmark has transitioned from scattered initiatives to a more structured plant-based policy framework. A turning point came with the creation of the Plant-Based Food Grant and later the National Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods, which marked a historic articulation of political ambition. The plan provided a shared reference point, enabled coalition-building, and gave NGOs a tool to hold politicians accountable. Its symbolic and reputational impact was immense, positioning Denmark as a global frontrunner and inspiring debates about a European action plan.

Drawing on the legacy of the organic strategy, Denmark brought together traditionally opposing actors — farmers, NGOs, researchers, and industry — in dialogue. Conflict was not eliminated but reframed as “constructive conflict”, where disagreements coexist with collaboration.

The plant-based action plan, the initiatives described within it, and the increased collaboration and participation around a common goal are the result of actors representing diverse interests and of their ability and willingness to agree on and formulate that goal through a pragmatic, collaborative approach.

The plant-based goals and the action plan allow for multiple approaches to reducing the climate, environmental and

health impacts of food consumption and production. The structures agreed upon increase support for pure plant-based initiatives and set higher plant-based production and consumption as a core objective. Simultaneously, both the plant-based action plan and related political agreements support the sustainable innovation of agricultural production and supply chains in general, as well as supporting the development of plant-rich products. This approach has created legitimacy and durability, ensuring that plant-based policies are seen not as a zero-sum attack on agriculture, but as a shared societal project.

Building on this foundation, Denmark holds significant potential to contribute to the necessary global transition of agriculture towards a more plant-based food system. The government’s vision is that Denmark takes an active role in this transition, with Danish agricultural production, exports, and dietary practices serving as an inspiration for greener food systems worldwide, while promoting healthy, climate- and environmentally friendly plant-based foods.

Today, Denmark has assembled a rich ecosystem of funding programmes and partnerships that collectively cover the entire TRL chain from research to market. Importantly, these initiatives do not just allow but often demand multi-actor collaboration. Yet, challenges remain. The Danish system still resembles a

patchwork of fragmented programmes with separate mandates, limited knowledge-sharing structures, and no overarching authority to aid and supersize coherence and coordination. Coordination efforts, such as the Fast-Forward Plant-Based Food partnership, are emerging but remain at an early stage and lack formal governance authority.

Drawing on stakeholder interviews and case-based evidence, this chapter identifies both key enablers of progress and persistent friction points. The aim is to distil transferable lessons for policymakers, funders, and innovation actors seeking to support the plant-based agenda at national and European levels. (Methodology: see Chapter 1 and those we interviewed in the appendix).

Key-findings

1 Political articulation created momentum

Denmark's National Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods functioned less as a list of new measures and more as a clear, shared commitment that enables accountability, coalition-building, and international signal value.

2 Constructive dissent combined with institutionalized inclusion fosters durability

Denmark's ability to accommodate disagreement while formalizing collaboration – rooted in the legacy of the organic strategy – has broadened ownership and strengthened policy resilience.

3 Framing prevents zero-sum politics

By coupling plant-based goals with support for wider agri-food innovation, the transition is seen as a shared societal project – not an attack on agriculture.

4 Funding mechanisms catalyze local ownership and cross-sector collaboration

Earmarked programmes span the entire innovation chain and incentivize municipalities, SMEs, NGOs, and research institutions to form partnerships, build capacity, and implement tangible change in real-world contexts.

5 Bridge-building is an active task

Inclusive forums alone don't deliver; progress depends on proactive actors (often NGOs and innovators) investing in trust-building, compromise, and practical pathways for reluctant partners.

6 The system remains characterized by fragmentation and limited coordination

Despite progress, the landscape appears as a patchwork of overlapping mandates, limited knowledge exchange, and a lack of overarching governance. Emerging initiatives such as the Fast-Forward Plant-Based Food partnership show promise, but stronger coordination and shared platforms are needed to achieve greater impact.

Setting the direction – how political ambition and articulation create momentum

Denmark's experience shows that transformation begins with political ambition and the articulation of a shared direction. The National Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods became a reference point not for its new measures, but for the commitment, accountability, and common framework it created – with symbolic power extending beyond Denmark.

Equally important, its durability rests on the process. By combining constructive dissent (political pragmatism) with institutionalised inclusion, Denmark has enabled coalitions across seemingly opposing interests, echoing the organic policy legacy. This pragmatic and inclusive model demonstrates how political articulation, dialogue, and broad ownership together create both momentum, legitimacy, and, importantly, action.

Policy ambition and dialogue sustain momentum: both nationally and internationally

The Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods emerged as a central reference point among the stakeholders we interviewed. It was generally regarded as a positive and important policy outcome, not least because it articulated a clear ambition and outlined a pathway for moving forward. In particular, the establishment of the Plant-Based Food Grant (before the

plan itself) and the subsequent increase in funding explicitly dedicated to plant-based development were highlighted as pivotal in advancing a more plant-based society.

At the same time, many interviewees characterised the action plan as a light-touch initiative. Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal, director and co-founder of the Think Tank Frej, notes that the action plan is “a summary of everything that was already happening. There was nothing new in that action plan”.

However, one of the central findings of our interview study lies less in the content of the plan than in its process value: a shared foundation and the political commitment involved in drafting and adopting it, the way it has helped structure coalitions, and the accountability it has created among political actors. Stella Staunstrup, head of secretariat of the Danish Plant-Based Business Association [Plante-branchen], stresses that civil society itself was among the driving forces behind the plan:

“ We were among those behind the vision report that created the action plan, and it received massive political backing.

At the same time, she warns that a plan is only the starting point. Once adopted, it requires persistent effort to secure resources and implementation:

“The struggle doesn't end there. You have to keep going - using the action plan to remind politicians that they have committed themselves, and to argue for more funding.”

Beyond serving as a tool for holding politicians accountable to their commitments, another central finding of the interview study is the action plan's symbolic and reputational power internationally. As Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal observes, Anders Martin Klöcker, director of Innovation at the Danish Agriculture & Food Council, likewise emphasises that the action plan essentially consists of “what had already been decided.” However, he emphasised that “it was still an action plan after all”—and thus visible

proof that Denmark was the first country in the world to have a dedicated plan for plant-based foods. “And it is being used by those who want to see the EU adopt one as well.”

Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl, executive director of the Vegetarian Society of Denmark and chair of the International Vegetarian Union, likewise stressed that the government's decision to engage in broad partnerships with both industry organisations and civil society actors gave the plan additional legitimacy and signal value. By entering as a partner alongside the Agriculture & Food Council, the Organic Association, Confederation og Danish Industry (DI), Danish Chamber of Commerce (Dansk Erhverv), and others, the Danish government helped send “a strong signal outward, and we believe this is an important way forward in Europe – showing that across roles we agree this transition must be promoted.”



Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal also stresses the international symbolic value of the plan:

“From a branding and international perspective, it has been invaluable - even if, in Denmark, it was mainly a compilation of initiatives already underway.

Beyond its symbolic value, the Danish action plan also serves a strategic function internationally. By serving as a visible reference point, it provides the EU with a concrete example to point to when advocating for stronger commitments:

“They [EU] can simply copy the Danish action plan or the purpose and vision of the Plant-Based Food Grant.

(Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal)

A central lesson from the Danish experience is that political articulation itself has transformative power. By formulating a dedicated National Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods, Denmark has signalled both political will and long-term ambition.

The act of setting down commitments has created a shared point of reference that guides actors across the food system. In this context, Denmark stands out as a frontrunner in making ambition

explicit. Internationally, it serves as a visible example that inspires debates on stronger commitments and offers a concrete model for those advocating a future European action plan.

Constructive dissent and institutionalised inclusion shape policy outcomes

While Denmark’s action plan provided direction, its legitimacy and durability were forged during its development. A defining feature of the Danish model has been the ability to combine constructive dissent with institutionalised inclusion. In practice, this means creating space for disagreement while still building ownership across traditionally opposing camps. The culture and structures of the political process have thus promoted pragmatic consensus-making among Danish NGOs and interest groups.

This approach has roots in the country’s experience with the organic strategy. As Per Kølster, chair of the national park Kongernes Nordsjælland and former president of Organic Denmark, recalls, the establishment of the Organic Food Council in 1987 created a systemic governance structure in which diverse interests—farmers, retailers, NGOs, and policymakers—were represented. The council was responsible for advice, labelling, control, and funding, creating what he describes as a comprehensive solution.

The plant-based agenda has drawn on this legacy. When describing the method of political discourse in Denmark, Paul Holmbeck, director of Holmbeck Eco-Consult and former director of Organic Denmark, recalls that when the organic strategy was first being discussed and drafted, the agricultural sector was not particularly positive. But many dialogues, farm visits, and collaborative projects helped. They saw that organic could help them reach environmental goals that they struggled with:

“ And they [the agricultural sector and interest organisations] saw us gaining traction in the market and in the fields, and if something gains traction, they want to step in and take control. Researchers have called it constructive conflict. We may be in conflict on some issues, but we can still collaborate on others. And that is how we managed to push the organic agenda forward.

The ability to combine disagreement with collaboration continues to characterise plant-based policy today. As Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl explains:

“ If there is also room for open disagreement, we [the Vegetarian Society] are happy to cooperate with everyone. We can agree to disagree with the Agriculture and Food Council on many things. But we focus on where we can agree. LOF [Agriculture & Food Council] invited us to develop a joint research and development

strategy four years ago, because they thought we seemed reasonable — and as they said: let's focus on plants.

Such examples illustrate that even sceptical or traditionally conservative actors are not excluded but rather invited to participate in cooperation. This both strengthens legitimacy and helps ensure that the plant-based transition is not seen as a zero-sum conflict but as a shared societal endeavour.

Also, both Boisen Lendal and Dragsdahl stress that Denmark's ability to bring together actors who might elsewhere be adversaries constitutes a unique national strength:

“ In other countries, this [the Plant-based transition] is seen as a war against farmers. You get nowhere if you position yourself against agriculture. In Denmark, by contrast, we can create agreements where plant-based growth happens alongside animal production. That way, the agricultural sector sees opportunities rather than only threats, and they can adapt their business models instead of resisting change.

(Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal)

Rather than excluding sceptical voices, this process gradually integrates them, ensuring that fairness and production adaptation are addressed, and that resistance is transformed into co-owner-

ship. This is crucial, as policies developed in opposition to powerful incumbents risk being short-lived. Inclusion, even if negotiated and imperfect, lends durability.

European debates echo these insights. A Joint Position signed by over 130 organisations in 2025 stresses that an EU action plan for plant-based foods must ensure inclusion across the value chain, from farmers to consumers (European Environmental Bureau, 2025, s. 1).⁴

The Danish case provides a dual lesson. On one hand, constructive dissent—where actors can disagree yet still cooperate—ensures that even contested agendas can move forward. On the other hand, institutionalised inclusion—through councils, funds, and partnership requirements—ensures that structures and resources support cooperation.

Together, these mechanisms turn potential opposition into negotiated consensus, allowing Denmark to anchor its plant-based policy in a broad, pragmatic, inclusive, and bridge-building coalition.

The outcome is not always maximal ambition; compromises are inherent. But the trade-off is durability: policies developed through dissent and inclusion may be less radical, yet they are politically resilient. In contexts where polarisation

blocks food policy reform, Denmark's experience illustrates that inclusive, negotiated processes—grounded in pragmatism, de-dramatisation, and active bridge-building—can convert scepticism into shared responsibility and thereby lay the groundwork for systemic change.



⁴ Call for an Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods, 2025: https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Joint_call_EU_Action_Plan_for_Plant-Based_Foods_Jan2025.pdf

Shaping the system – how programmes organise, align, and empower innovation across the value chain

Denmark's plant-based transition is not only propelled by political ambition but also by the funding programmes that organise research, partnerships, and innovation. To understand how these programmes shape the system, this chapter will examine four ways in which funding programmes appear to positively influence the transformation in the food system and the plant-based agenda, including their role in empowering innovation across the value chain.

First, we highlight the independent effect that financing such projects can have by creating a stronger sense of local ownership among societal actors.

Second, we explore how the programmes can effectively foster public-private partnerships, thereby ensuring that projects are not confined to research but are anchored in real-world contexts and become more relevant to everyday practices.

Third, we consider how a more coordinated institutional effort could enhance the

momentum of plant-based projects and initiatives. Finally, we turn to how placing greater emphasis on demand-side measures in resource allocation can help prevent innovation from remaining on the shelf or confined to the laboratory.

Funding as a catalyst for local ownership

Alongside its plant-based action plan, Denmark has assembled an increasingly rich ecosystem of programmes, funds, and partnerships supporting plant-based innovation. Flagship initiatives such as Plant2Food, AgriFoodTure, the Green Development and Demonstration Programme (GUDP), the Plant-Based Food Grant, and, most recently, the Fast-Forward Partnership span the entire TRL chain – from early-stage research to market-ready products.

A central mechanism behind these initiatives is the role of funding itself. When the state allocates resources (e.g., through the Plant-Based Food Grant) that many different actors can apply for, it nudges them to engage with the agenda and hire



capacity to implement changes in their specific contexts. According to Dragsdahl, this creates local ownership:

“What Plant-Based Food Grant, for example, can do is that when the state allocates some money that all sorts of professionals and actors can apply for, it gives these actors an incentive to start engaging with the agenda. This has led to many hiring a staff member to work on implementation — whether in Danish restaurants and cafés, in agricultural schools, or in hospitals. It creates that sense of anchoring and ownership among the actors, because many of them cannot and/or will not prioritise it unless the funding is available. And that, I think, is what is interesting, and I also believe it would be attractive in other countries.”

This sense of anchoring has been made possible by Denmark’s Action Plan, which institutionalised dedicated resources at a scale not seen before. As Stella Staunstrup highlights, the establishment of the Plant-Based Food Grant marked a turning point by moving from token amounts to a major financial commitment:

“Five years ago, five million DKK in an organic fund was considered sufficient to also cover plant-based initiatives. Now, the Plant Fund provides more than one billion DKK dedicated solely to plant-based projects. That has made a real difference for those entering the sector.”

Yet she also stresses that funding remains the most significant bottleneck for advancing the plant-based agenda. While Denmark has created unique plant-

based funding programmes, structural imbalances persist: animal-based products continue to benefit from decades of subsidies and support schemes, while plant-based producers struggle to compete on price. As she notes, “it is still simply harder and more expensive to be a plant-based producer,” a gap that keeps many consumers from choosing plant-based options.

From funding to collaboration: how programmes bring actors together

Each of the actors in the ecosystem of funding plant-based food projects targets different segments of the innovation chain from basic research to market deployment. While the more general research and innovation system in Denmark primarily focuses on the impact of research and innovation, the design of the four initiatives’ funding calls typically encourages – or even requires – coalition-building and collaboration among diverse actors. A defining feature of the four initiatives is their use of a public-private partnership model.

Plant2Food explicitly requires collaboration between academia and industry by creating a platform for public-private partnerships where pre-competitive research can be developed to advance plant-based products and processes: “All projects must include at least one or more industry partners and collaborators from other knowledge institutions” (Fast-forward Plant-based Food, s. 1).

The Plant-Based Food Grant likewise emphasises cross-actor collaboration. One of its three strategic development areas is “*Sector bridging: Strengthening the entire value chain*,” and its grants “can be allocated to businesses, organisations, and research and knowledge dissemination institutions, among others.” (Fast-forward Plant-based Food, s. 3). As noted earlier, between 2022 and 2025, the fund supported 62 projects, of which 24 involved participants representing at least two different domains – such as companies, universities, NGOs, industry organisations, or public authorities.

AgriFoodTure also requires multi-actor collaboration, noting that: “*To be considered, a project should consist of partners that are active participants in both the design of the project, the realisation of the project and the active implementation of the results [...] Relevant collaborations across business, research institutions and public institutions must also be striven for.*” (Fast-forward Plant-based Food, s. 2).

Similarly, **GUDP** supports a wide range of development and demonstration projects that are almost exclusively collaborative in nature and typically involve multiple types of stakeholders: “*GUDP will realise its vision by supporting innovative and business-oriented projects that are well-thought-out throughout the value chain.*” (Fast-forward Plant-based Food, s. 4).

Also, the interviewees have noted how these funding mechanisms do more than “just” create projects – they incentivise collaboration. Stella Staunstrup, for example, stresses that the Plant-Based Food Grant has generated “a lot more co-operation between businesses, organisations, and universities, because they can apply for this pool together. It provides an incentive for them to move forward collectively.” She further highlights how such mechanisms bring actors into dialogue that otherwise would not have engaged with one another:

“It creates really good synergies and an opportunity for businesses, associations, and universities to meet and collaborate – something that might not have happened without the funding.”

Taken together, this more recent generation of Danish initiatives not only promotes but, in many cases, actively demands that projects involve municipalities, SMEs, NGOs, universities, farmers, food companies, and end-users.

The Need for Stronger Institutional Coordination

Denmark has succeeded in building a broad ecosystem of programmes that fund plant-based projects across the value chain. Yet, despite this progress, there is still no overarching framework to tie the different initiatives together. Several interviewees described the current system as a patchwork of programmes created sequentially, each with its own mandate. The recently established Fast-Forward Partnership seeks to reduce this fragmentation by fostering coordi-





nation among the four largest initiatives, but it remains in its early stages and lacks formal authority.

A key concern raised by stakeholders is that resources risk being spread too thinly across many small projects instead of being channelled into larger, more impactful strategies. As Stella Staunstrup observed, the existing funds have undoubtedly created momentum, but their potential is limited without stronger coordination:

“Of course, the projects have to be good, and that’s exactly what these funds are designed to support. But sometimes it might be even better if we carried out a more coordinated effort instead of small projects here and there.”

This lack of coordination also creates inefficiencies. Christian Bugge Henriksen, associate professor, Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences, University of Copenhagen, pointed out that, in the

absence of a unifying framework and knowledge platform, projects sometimes duplicate earlier work rather than build on it:

“You can easily have projects that simply repeat what a project three years ago had already discovered, because the knowledge is not being passed on. There needs to be a platform that makes full use of the experiences from previous projects.”

The fragmented landscape can be equally challenging. Staunstrup highlighted that while the Plant-Based Food Grant has become the most visible and well-known, these risks overshadow other relevant funding opportunities. Many actors lack a clear overview of what funds exist, when specific calls are open, and how to navigate between them: “The Plant-

Based Food Grant is the one everyone knows, so that is where people apply. But there is not really a broader overview of all the calls and opportunities.”

On the one hand, Denmark has managed to establish an unusually comprehensive set of platforms spanning the full TRL spectrum—a rare achievement in international comparison. On the other hand, the system continues to suffer from overlaps, fragmentation, and a lack of overarching governance and transparency. If Denmark is to move from a patchwork of projects to a coherent innovation system, it will require stronger institutionalised coordination and clearer mechanisms for knowledge exchange. Without this, there is a risk of activity without the cumulative, integrated impact needed for systemic transformation.

Demand-side innovation is emerging, but requires stronger integration

When innovation is discussed, the focus is often on the supply side—new crops, processing technologies, and research and development projects. Yet consumer behaviour is an equally decisive driver of systemic change. Technical breakthroughs only matter if they are translated into meals that people actually eat.

This is where lessons from Denmark's organic strategy also become relevant. Its success rested not only on production standards, but also on the integration of consumer education, labelling, and legitimacy into the policy framework. As Per Kølster put it, the strength of the organic strategy was that it became “a solution all the way around,” where consumer trust and demand worked hand in hand with supply-side measures.

The same logic applies to the plant-based transition. As Stella Staunstrup emphasised, focusing only on production or retail access risks overlooking the barriers that prevent consumers from buying plant-based products in the first place. Plant-based alternatives often face disadvantages in price, shelf placement, and visibility, making them less attractive despite technological advances. Effective demand-side projects, therefore, start by identifying these consumer barriers and only then adjusting products, environments, or communication strategies. As she noted, many successful initiatives “turn it around” by first asking why

consumers are not buying the products and then changing conditions accordingly. This approach has been pursued in collaboration with universities, businesses, and NGOs—for example, through the project *Mad på Farten 2.0* (food on the go), developed with the Danish Vegetarian Association, which introduces plant-based fast-food options in kebab shops and burger bars to meet consumers where they are.

In 2023, the Plant-Based Food Grant allocated half of its budget to consumer-oriented projects, including nudging campaigns in retail, national initiatives such as “Green January” and “National Vegetable Week”, as well as the awareness campaign “Make it easy to eat legumes.” (Plantefonden, 2023). This demonstrates how funding programmes themselves can play a decisive role in shifting the focus to the demand side, ensuring that consumer behaviour becomes an integrated part of the innovation agenda.

At the municipal level, the City of Copenhagen has committed to reducing the climate footprint of public meals by 25% by 2025 through plant-based procurement strategies. Together with initiatives like *Mad på Farten 2.0*, these examples reflect a growing recognition that systemic change requires not only new products but also cultural and behavioural shifts that make plant-based choices attractive, affordable, and accessible in everyday life.

How inclusive public-private projects make transformation real

Building bridges: the active work behind project collaboration

Transformative change does not happen automatically when actors are gathered around the same table. Partnerships and projects only become meaningful drivers of innovation and transition when someone actively takes responsibility for moving the process forward. Interviewees repeatedly highlighted that inclusive structures alone are not enough; it is the initiative and bridge-building of engaged actors that determines whether collaboration succeeds or stalls.

As Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl puts it:

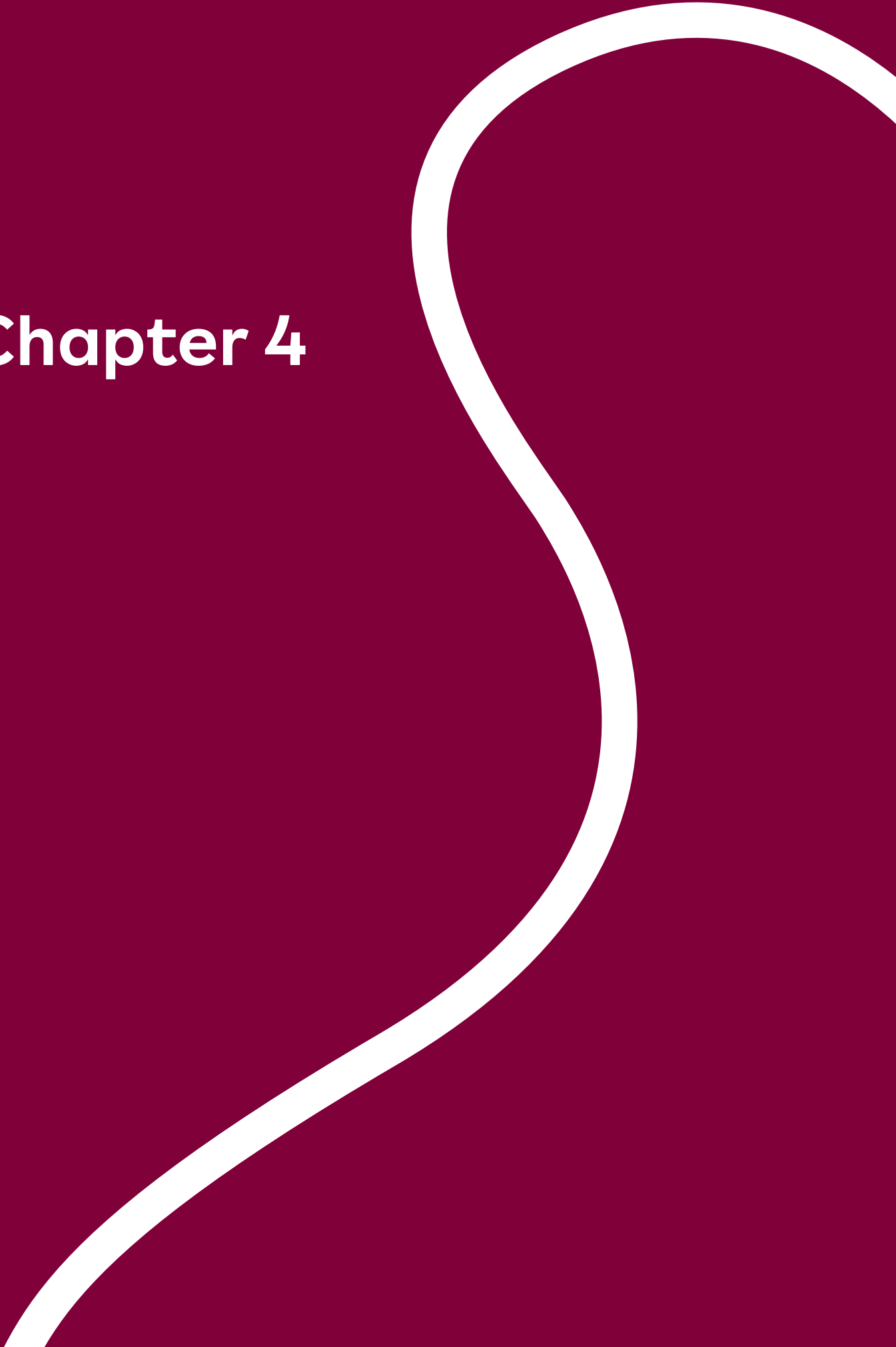
“If you are the ones who want to change the world, then it is you who have to start building the bridge. You cannot expect conservative, traditional agriculture to build the first part of the bridge. You have to begin by reaching out and meeting them.”

The responsibility for compromise, dialogue, and bridge-building lies with

those pushing for change. In practice, this means that particularly NGOs, progressive companies, or research environments advocating new solutions must be ready to reach across divides, listen to concerns, and design pathways that make sense for more reluctant or traditional partners as well. Without such proactive engagement, collaborations risk stalling in disagreements or becoming symbolic rather than productive – particularly when partners start from diverging interests, mandates, or time horizons.

The lesson is therefore that transformation requires more than formal inclusion: it requires initiative. The actors who envision a different future must be willing to invest extra effort in building trust, creating common ground, and lowering the barriers to participation for others. When this happens, partnerships can move beyond negotiation deadlocks and instead unlock the potential for joint experimentation, shared ownership, and real change on the ground.

Chapter 4



Strategic recommendation: translating Danish lessons to European action

This chapter distils the key lessons from Denmark's approach to the plant-based transition and explores how they can inform European-level action. The objective is not to replicate Denmark's model wholesale, but to identify adaptable principles, policy mechanisms, and institutional practices that can support a robust and context-sensitive European plant-based action plan.

Before considering transfer, it is essential to recognise that institutional realities differ. Several interviewees cautioned against "Brussels dictation," stressing that EU action should enable and support national efforts rather than prescribe uniform solutions.

Success in Denmark has relied on long-term trust-building, gradual alignment of goals across ministries and sectors, and a political culture that prizes consensus. These conditions are not given elsewhere. Moreover, while Denmark is a frontrunner, experts pointed to gaps that remain: weak demand-side measures, an imbalance in funding across the innovation chain, and the challenge of sustaining collaboration once funding ends.

Still, the Danish case offers valuable lessons. What today looks like a coherent

model was built step by step: connecting actors, creating trust, agreeing on common goals, funding collaboration, and repeating the cycle.

The result is a system in which universities, firms, and intermediaries engage across the value chain, supported by instruments such as the Plant-Based Food Grant, AgriFoodTure, Plant2Food, and GUDP. Timing and context mattered—strong climate mandates, visible public support, and capable institutions created fertile ground for action. Yet the principles that underpin this progress—structured collaboration, continuity across the innovation chain, and attention to both demand and supply—are more widely transferable.

The recommendations that follow are therefore organised thematically. The first section highlights foundational conditions of governance and trust. The second considers the design of instruments to ensure continuity across the value chain and balanced attention to both supply and demand. The third reflects the political commitment required to sustain change over time.

Foundational conditions: governance and trust

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Danish approach is the way governance has been organised around public-private partnerships (PPPs). Initiatives such as Plant2Food and AgriFoodTure have created structured arenas where universities, companies, NGOs, and public agencies can jointly set agendas and co-fund projects.

These platforms are not mere consultation forums. They carry budgets, have decision-making authority, and deliberately balance representation to prevent domination by any one group. This type of governance has allowed actors to experiment together, align incentives, and build trust over repeated funding cycles.

For Europe, the lesson is that inclusivity must be both genuine and resourced. If civil society, SMEs, or municipalities are invited into European consortia without the means to participate meaningfully,

inclusion becomes tokenistic. Funding should therefore cover participation costs and capacity-building, enabling actors beyond large firms and research institutions to play a role. While the EU's more complex governance structure makes this harder than in Denmark, mechanisms such as rotating leadership or independent facilitation could help maintain balance.

Trust is not built overnight. Denmark's two decades of iterative collaboration created relationships that allowed for more ambitious policymaking once the groundwork was in place. At the European level, this underlines the importance of continuity: one-off projects are not enough. Transition requires stable institutions or "mission organisations" that can connect projects over time, carry lessons forward, and ensure that momentum is not lost when a funding call closes.



Designing instruments: connecting supply, demand, and the full innovation chain

A second defining feature of the Danish approach is the deliberate effort to link research, development, and demonstration along the entire TRL spectrum. While gaps remain—particularly at the high-TRL supply end and the low-TRL demand end—the Danish portfolio as a whole spans from basic science to market applications. This is unusual, as many countries and EU programmes suffer from fragmentation: research is funded in isolation, while downstream firms struggle to access risk-sharing tools for scaling.

Instruments such as AgriFoodTure and GUDP address this by funding applied research and demonstration projects, often in partnership with industry. At the other end, Research Fund Denmark and Plant2Food fund fundamental or pre-competitive research, creating a pipeline of ideas and early-stage collaborations.

Together, these initiatives form something close to a “red thread” from TRL1 to TRL9. For Europe, the lesson is not to copy these instruments one by one, but to ensure continuity across the chain. Calls should deliberately link researchers with downstream partners, and EU-level funds should address the valley of death by providing risk-sharing instruments such as guarantees or advance purchase agreements.

Equally important is attention to and significant funding directed at the demand side. Denmark has begun to include measures aimed at consumer behaviour, procurement, and food culture.

The Plant-Based Food Grant stands out in this respect, having supported projects that worked with fast-food vendors, retail chains, and public kitchens. While modest in scale, these initiatives recognise that innovation only delivers impact if consumers adopt it. Lessons from Denmark’s organic policy reinforce this point: consumer engagement was as important as R&D in driving uptake.

For Europe, systematic demand-side activation could include integrating plant-based criteria into public procurement guidelines for schools and hospitals, funding consumer-facing pilots in different cultural contexts, and supporting communication campaigns that normalise plant-based choices. None of these measures are simple. Dietary preferences differ widely across Europe, and public opinion can be polarised. Yet, the Danish experience shows that demand-side measures, while politically sensitive, are essential for achieving impact.



Finally, diversity of participation matters. Denmark's plant-based initiatives deliberately engage different types of actors:

AgriFoodTure mobilises consortia of firms and universities, and Plant2Food invites firms to shape early-stage research. The Plant-Based Food Grant, in particular, has been able to activate a broad group of organisations, public and private, that are rarely involved in traditional research and innovation projects. This diversity allows actors to participate where it makes most sense for them, while still pursuing

the common goal. For the EU, the recommendation is to design calls and platforms that accommodate multiple entry points, not only for extensive research-industry consortia but also for NGOs, municipalities, and SMEs. This requires dedicated resources to lower participation barriers but pays off in richer collaboration and broader legitimacy.

Take a step back, identify the gaps, and design instruments that fit. And ensure coordination with existing structures.

Securing long-term political commitment

The third lesson from Denmark is the importance of sustained political commitment. The Danish plant-based agenda has benefitted from governments across party lines that have maintained a focus on sustainable food systems, even if specific instruments and emphases have shifted over time. The 2023 Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods did not emerge in a vacuum but was built on years of prior experimentation, stakeholder dialogue, and earlier policies in organics and sustainability.

For Europe, the challenge is greater. Commitment varies widely across Member States, and EU policy processes are more exposed to lobbying pressures. Still, there are ways to secure continuity. One is to anchor plant-based objectives in binding frameworks—such as integrating them into updates of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) or the Farm-to-Fork strategy.

This approach, if handled poorly, could, however, create alienation and dissent among those who are dependent on, and whose businesses have been shaped by, the CAP over many decades. Therefore, this may not align with an inclusive policy development strategy.

Another, more delicate approach, is to dedicate budget lines explicitly to the

plant-based transition, European or National plant-based food grants, ensuring that 1) funding does not depend on ad hoc political priorities and 2) that funding of plant-based projects and initiatives does not come directly from defunding a specific group. Finally, institutionalising cross-ministerial coordination – at both national and EU level – can prevent fragmentation and ensure that plant-based measures are not sidelined within broader agricultural or climate policy.

Finally, European nations have relative freedom to allocate CAP funds within the framework. Therefore, nations have the possibility to allocate more to plant-based action than they do today.

Political commitment also requires clarity. Denmark's decision to publish a dedicated action plan for plant-based foods signalled seriousness and created accountability. Simply putting objectives on paper can mobilise stakeholders and provide a benchmark against which progress can be measured.

For the EU, a similar step could be transformative: a formal European plant-based action plan, not as a straitjacket but as a coordinating framework, could lend visibility and coherence to efforts across Member States.

Conclusion: Towards a European plant-based action plan

The Danish experience shows that plant-based transitions can be accelerated when governance is inclusive, funding spans the full innovation chain, and demand-side measures complement supply-side innovation. At the same time, it reminds us that progress is context-dependent: it took decades of trust-building, political consensus, and institutional stability to reach the point where a national action plan was possible.

For Europe, the task is not replication but adaptation. The core principles—structured and resourced collaboration, continuity across TRLs, attention to demand as well as supply, and sustained political commitment—are widely applicable, but their implementation must reflect national contexts and political economies.

If Europe can combine these elements, it has the opportunity to build a robust and future-proof plant-based foods ecosystem. The stakes are high. A shift towards plant-based consumption is not only about healthier diets and lower emissions, but also about positioning European agri-food systems competitively in a rapidly changing global market. Denmark's story shows that progress is possible when actors are connected, goals are shared, and collaboration is deliberately funded and stewarded. The challenge now is to carry that lesson forward, translating it into a European context where diversity is greater, governance more complex, but the opportunity for transformation no less urgent.

Interviewees' recommendations going forward

Building on the previous sections, this section turns insights into action. It distils interviewees' concrete proposals into targeted recommendations for EU and national decision-makers, funders, and eco-system actors.

The recommendations focus on four levers: governance and coordination (including arm's-length drafting and EU-national alignment), funding design

(scale, continuity, and parity for plant-based initiatives), market development (demand-side tools, procurement, nudging), and knowledge flows (cross-border collaboration and structured best-practice sharing). They synthesise recurring themes rather than a negotiated consensus and are presented to inform practical next steps and policy design.



1

Replicate the organic success: adopt a coherent EU framework for plant-based action

The success of the EU's organic policy did not appear overnight. As Paul Holmbeck emphasised, Denmark “clearly set the agenda for organic food” by introducing the world's first national organic standards, which became the starting point for European organic standards, and by

launching the world's first national Organic Action Plan in 1995, which became a template for the first EU Organic Action Plan. This coherent framework provided a model for how policy could deliver measurable results for both farmers and consumers.



A European plant-based action plan should follow the same logic, offering shared definitions, goals, and pathways for Member States. As Holmbeck argued:

“ This is exactly what we now need in the plant-based field: National and EU action plans creating strong

policy frameworks and an enabling environment for plant-based transition and building on the holistic Danish model, where accelerating organic plant-based foods is a central element. After all, it matters - for people and planet - how those plants in plant-based foods are grown.

2

Ensure arms-length processes for an ambitious EU action plan

A key lesson from Denmark is that the level of ambition in an action plan often depends on who is tasked with drafting it. Anders Martin Klöcker pointed out that:

“If one wanted to convince the European Commission to develop an EU action plan, it would be a good

idea to make sure that the commission itself was not the one drafting it.

Instead, the task should fall to an institutional body at arm's length, capable of developing a bold and creative first draft.



This reflects the Danish experience with several organic strategies, where best practice clearly was when the initial draft was prepared by a body (the Organic

Food Council), serviced by an agency under the Ministry of Food, but still at arm's length to the minister.

3

Financial backing is essential to level the playing field for plant-based producers

Stella Staunstrup stresses that the Danish action plan did more than articulate ambition – it created the Plant-Based Food Grant, a state-backed funding stream now amounting to more than 1 billion DKK dedicated exclusively to plant-based initiatives. This marks a dramatic shift compared to just a few years ago.

Staunstrup highlights how this financial foundation has been crucial in enabling actors to take risks and invest in plant-based innovation:

“Economic support has been a huge challenge for those daring to enter the plant-based industry, because you simply don't get the same support for plant-based as you do for animal production.”

The imbalance is even sharper at the European level. While animal producers

continue to benefit from substantial subsidies and support schemes, plant-based producers remain disadvantaged:

“There is still much more state support available if you are an animal producer.”

Systemic change requires not just political ambition but substantial, dedicated funding streams. Without financial backing, plant-based initiatives cannot compete on equal terms with heavily subsidised animal production. If the EU is serious about accelerating the protein transition, it must replicate this model by earmarking resources for plant-based foods and correcting the structural funding imbalance that currently favours animal agriculture.



4

For the transition to succeed, EU resources must be channelled into national and local plant-based initiatives

The EU's current funding schemes, such as Horizon projects, are often criticised for being too research-oriented and disconnected from real-world practice. According to Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal, this approach risks keeping innovation confined to academic and high-level circles rather than driving the broad transformation needed across society. She stresses that:

“Horizon projects today tend to be overly research-heavy, elitist, and far removed from the practices where change actually happens.”

To overcome this gap, resources must reach national and local levels where implementation occurs. Boisen Lendal suggests establishing “National Plant Funds” in every Member State, financed by EU resources, as a way to anchor the

transition closer to farmers, SMEs, municipalities, and local communities. In her words:

“If instead we had national funding schemes financed by EU resources, many more local actors could take part in the transition. In principle, one could establish a plant-based fund in every Member State, potentially by replicating the Danish Plant Fund.”

Such a model would not only generate momentum beyond universities but also empower diverse local actors to experiment, adapt, and scale solutions that fit their specific contexts. Anchoring plant-based initiatives nationally and locally is therefore essential if Europe wants to turn ambition into real-world transformation.



5

Use fiscal incentives and consumer nudging to drive dietary change

In addition to highlighting the need for EU support for “national plant-based food grants in Member States”, Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal also points out that political instruments shaping consumption patterns are equally essential. The EU already has funds available for marketing and consumer campaigns, but real change requires politicians to deploy fiscal tools and incentives to actively influence consumer choices.

She points to the transport sector as a successful precedent, where fiscal meas-

ures helped accelerate the shift from diesel cars to electric vehicles:

“There are plenty of EU funds available to market and focus on consumption. But it requires that the EU and politicians dare to say that we must actually intervene in consumption. Just as we did with cars, where we lowered taxes on electric vehicles to nudge consumers away from diesel, and it worked. Why should we not do the same in the food sector?”



If Europe is serious about food system transformation, it must go beyond supporting production and create a vision for

future consumption, backed by concrete policy instruments such as tax reforms and targeted consumer initiatives.

6

An EU plan must stimulate Member States to act

A European action plan for plant-based foods will only be effective if it ensures real implementation at the national level. As Paul Holmbeck emphasises, the lesson from organics is that ambitious EU targets alone are insufficient; real progress depends on whether Member States build their own frameworks to translate those targets into practice.

He points out that while the EU's 25% target for organics was important:

“Where it has fallen short is in ensuring strong national policy frameworks in each Member State. We have 27 countries, and unless they all develop national strategies – backed by research, farmer support schemes, and supply chain development – the transition will stall.”

The tools are already in place: EU funding streams that support research, farmer subsidies, and supply chain development. The real challenge, Holmbeck argues, is to earmark and direct these resources specifically towards plant-based initiatives and secure a strong organic pillar in these national policies. Without such national frameworks, a European plan risks becoming little more than “ambition on paper” rather than a driver of systemic change.

The rich lessons from Denmark's organic policies, that Denmark drew heavily on in development of a national strategy for Plant-based foods, can also inspire organic and plant-based policies across the EU: Use of an agile fund to support initiatives in all parts of the supply chain, consumer awareness, strengthening of sector capacity to act as a catalyst in the market and in farming, and support for farmers in transition. Effective policies that can drive change at the national level can be enabled by EU policy.



7

Strengthening cross-border collaboration to improve market access for plant-based products

For Europe's plant-based transition to succeed, an EU action plan must not only support national initiatives but also foster stronger cross-border collaboration. As Stella Staunstrup explains:

“We need to strengthen collaboration across countries. Could we make it easier to export plant-based prod-

ucts abroad and import some of the good ones from other countries?”

Such measures would ensure that promising products are not confined to domestic markets but can reach consumers across Europe.



Staunstrup further points out that the challenge is not only about cross-border trade but also about building cooperation between companies. Many mid-sized producers, she notes, develop innovative new products but face significant barriers in gaining access to retail chains:

“Many of these mid-sized producers bring new products, but they need opportunities to get into retail chains. That's already a challenge in Denmark.

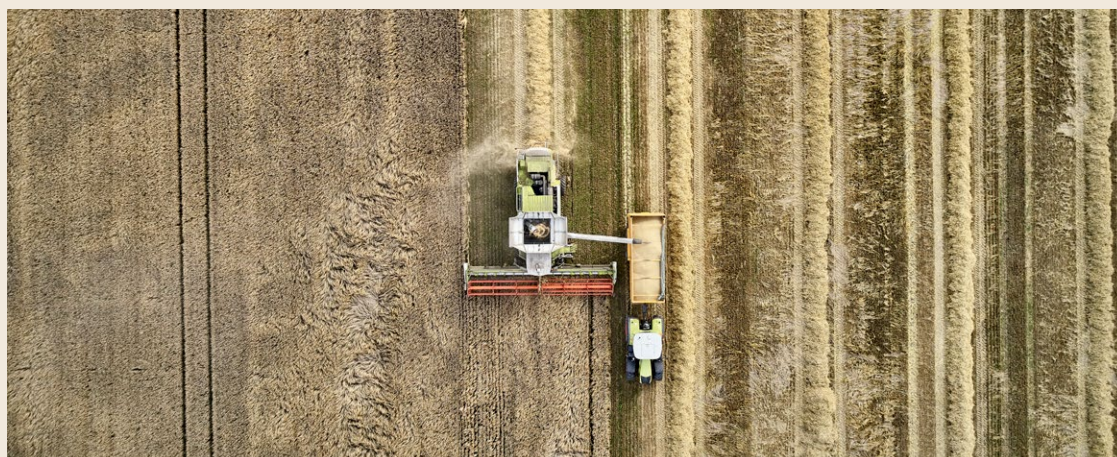
According to her, EU-level frameworks could help reduce these barriers by promoting collaboration between producers and retailers and by making it easier for actors to “meet each other, learn about each other's products, and access markets through collaboration.” She stresses that this should extend beyond retail, highlighting that “foodservice is an essential part of the equation too.”

8

Prioritise systematic sharing of best practices

One of the clearest lessons from organics is that progress accelerates when Member States systematically exchange knowledge and build on each other's successes. Yet, as Paul Holmbeck stresses, such exchange has often been too fragmented:

“That is how we could have moved faster within organics. For the plant-based transition, investing in structured best-practice sharing will be essential.”



To address this, Holmbeck points to the EU Commission's organic ambassador scheme from organics as an effective model. In every ministry, one designated officer was responsible for monitoring and supporting developments in organic policy and sharing knowledge across borders. According to him, replicating such a scheme for plant-based foods would not only prevent duplication of efforts but also motivate actors and create momentum:

“A similar setup for plant-based foods could ensure systematic knowledge sharing and help build momentum across Europe.”

A European plant-based action plan should institutionalise mechanisms for structured best-practice exchange. Without such systems, innovative solutions risk remaining confined to single Member States rather than spreading across Europe.

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Table 5

Appendix

List of interviewees

Name	Organisation	Key point
Christian Bugge Henriksen	University of Copenhagen, associate professor, Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences	Points to the risk of fragmentation of overlapping projects; stresses a need for coordination and transparent knowledge exchange.
Paul Holmbeck	Holmbeck EcoConsult	Lessons from the Organic Strategy: Inclusion of sceptical actors is crucial; highlights the value of “arm’s length” governance models.
Marie-Louise Boisen Lendal	Director and co-founder of Think Tank Frej; chair of the Plant Fund; board member of Friland	Governance is a key challenge; calls for a stronger coordinating body with real mandate and resources.
Rune-Christoffer Dragsdahl	Secretary-General, Vegetarian Society of Denmark; chair, International Vegetarian Union	Positions DVF as pragmatic but evidence-based NGO; stresses need to massively scale funding for plant-based alternatives; advocates inclusive partnerships with both NGOs and farming organisations; emphasises education, nudging, and professional training as levers; Denmark’s model shows how broad alliances can de-escalate conflicts.
Stella Staunstrup	Head of secretariat, Plant-Based Food Association (Plantebranchen)	Represents producers from startups to multinationals; advocates for an EU action plan; highlights the Danish Plant Fund as decisive; stresses structural economic barriers (subsidy imbalance, price gaps, limited shelf space); argues funding should create coordinated, lasting impact beyond fragmented projects.
Per Kølster	Chair of the National Park Kongernes Nordsjælland and former president of Organic Denmark	The establishment of the Organic Food Council in 1987 created a systemic governance structure in which diverse interests—farmers, retailers, NGOs, and policymakers—were represented. The council was responsible for advice, labelling, control, and funding, creating what he describes as a comprehensive solution.
Hanne Lakkenborg Kristensen	Professor and research group leader at Aarhus University, Department of Food Science – Plants, Food & Sustainability	Problem that knowledge is not operationalised; research is not translated into tools that kitchen staff can apply in daily work.
Nikita Misella Hansen	Postdoctoral researcher, Center for Clinical Research and Prevention – Section for Health Promotion and Prevention, Frederiksberg Hospital	Leads a large clinical trial on plant-based diets for chronic patients; notes both opportunities and challenges in collaborating with private firms on meal kits; stresses the importance of precision and quality in PPPs; suggest that measurable outcomes are essential for EU-level uptake.
Sisse Fagt	Technical University of Denmark (DTU), National Food Institute	Strong focus on consumer dimension; stresses that adoption depends on products meeting expectations on health, taste, and culture.
Lærke Kirstine Lund	Sector director for Plants and Plant-Based Foods, Danish Agriculture & Food Council	Focus on linking farmers and foodservice; highlights successful hospital partnership; stresses that good collaborations are built on shared business, not just ideals; warns against short-lived project logic.





