

# 3CO Final Event | Session 4 – Consumer Perspective

*October 21, 2025*



## Empowering Consumers Beyond Labels The Missing Pillars of Trust, Health & Participation

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*“Empowerment starts when consumers stop  
being the last link in the chain.”*



# Who we are

## Cittadinanzattiva/Active Citizenship Network

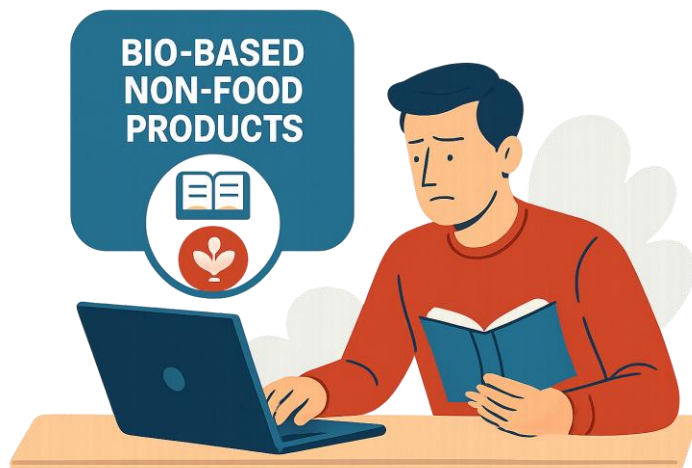


- Cittadinanzattiva APS is an organization, founded in Italy in 1978, which promotes citizens' activism for the protection of rights, the care of common goods, the support for people in conditions of weakness in Italy and abroad.
- since December 2001, Cittadinanzattiva operates daily, not only at the local and national level in Italy, but also at the European level thanks to its EU branch called “Active Citizenship Network” (ACN).
- Active in 30+ countries on health, sustainability & consumer empowerment
- **Motto:** “*From informed consumers to active citizens*”

### Our added value:

- Civic monitoring and consumer education
- Experience in participatory policy-making
- Ability to translate complex policies into citizens' language

# Setting the scene



How well do citizens really understand “bio-based”?

- “It’s organic.”
- “It’s biodegradable.”
- “No idea, but it sounds good for the planet.”

Only 1 in 3 Europeans feels informed about bio-based products (*Eurobarometer, 2024*)

*“In the 3CO consumer survey, almost 70% of respondents said they had heard of the term bio-based, yet fewer than 20% could explain it correctly.”*



A strong signal that **education and engagement** remain **weak links** in the chain.

# Education Left to Individuals



## Empowerment or Abandonment?

- No public strategy for consumer education in the bio-based transition
- Efforts fragmented, often led by private actors or projects
- Citizens expected to “educate themselves”



*“The Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission has repeatedly emphasized that citizens’ skills for the green transition are still underdeveloped — particularly in understanding new bio-based markets.”*

## Our contribution:

- Engaging citizens in evaluating certification systems (e.g. *Biorecer*)
- Civic–scientific education on responsible choices (e.g. *Sustainable Nutrition*)



**Proposal:** a European Public Programme for Consumer Empowerment  
– to institutionalize education as part of the Green Deal.

# • Health Connection Overlooked



## Bio-based ≠ Health-based

- “Bio” often misunderstood as “healthy”
- Weak communication on health and safety of non-food bio-based products
- Risk: greenwashing and loss of credibility

## Lesson from Generazione Sprek.O.:

- Linking sustainability and personal well-being increases motivation
- Promoting a One Health perspective – human, environmental, and civic health together

*“According to the WHO’s One Health framework, the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment — yet this systemic view is still missing in how we communicate about bio-based products.”*

# Participation Gaps



## Nothing About Consumers Without Consumers!

- Citizens rarely involved in design and certification processes
- Participation seen as a formality, not a resource

*“The OECD’s 2023 ‘Building Trust in Public Institutions’ report confirms that meaningful participation improves perceived fairness and compliance — two key drivers of sustainable consumption.”*

**Proposal:** We need to build the pathway *“from awareness to engagement”* — the transition from citizens who question to citizens who act and participate.



In a complex global context, citizens seek orientation on sustainability and innovation — areas that often raise questions and uncertainty.

**Participation** answers this need: citizens should not only be consulted but also understand and co-create the decisions that affect them.

Through participatory and co-creation processes, **mutual trust** grows between citizens and institutions, nurturing a shared commitment to the **common good**.





# A Call to Action



## Education • Health • Participation

→ The three missing pillars for citizens' trust.

“A sustainable bio-based transition must be co-created with citizens, not for citizens.”

*“The European Bioeconomy Strategy (2022 update) calls for stronger citizen involvement in innovation ecosystems — yet there’s still no coordinated programme to make it happen. That’s the gap our proposal wants to fill.”*

### Next step

Launch a Joint Task Force on Consumer Empowerment within EU bioeconomy projects.



*Thank you for the attention!*

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