

EU Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies – What to look out for

Media briefing

May 2020

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On May 20, the European Commission will launch its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies. The Farm to Fork strategy is a set of proposed legislative and voluntary actions as part of the European Green Deal claiming to make EU food “*the global standard for sustainability*”.

The Biodiversity Strategy is a package of commitments, targets and actions aiming to “put Europe's biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030” and to ensure external policies and actions do not negatively impact biodiversity abroad. It will include key elements for the UN-level 2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted in 2021.

Both are welcome moves to tackle our ecological and food crises. However, based on leaked drafts, it seems likely that a number of the key proposals in both strategies will be watered-down, non-binding and ineffective – and not sufficient to address the crises we face.

Farm to Fork Strategy

Pesticide reduction target

What's needed?

A reduction target of 80% by 2030 for the use of all synthetic pesticides in the EU in order to halt the sharp decline in bees and other pollinators. Over 80 NGOs and more than 300,000 EU citizens have called on the Commission to include this as a binding target. [2]

Synthetic pesticides prop up an expansionist industrial farming system which destroys rural communities and the environment.

The UN-level expert panel on nature (IPBES) says that industrial farming - driven by intensive pesticide use - is one of the main drivers of ecological collapse, and that a “fundamental, structural change” of our farming system is urgently needed to halt biodiversity loss. [3]

What the leak says

A lower or non-binding target, or no target at all, would mean the EU's farming system will continue to drive the ecological crisis.

Leaks of the Farm to Fork Strategy - which has the competence to propose pesticide law - lack targets. The draft version of the Biodiversity Strategy includes a target for a 50% reduction by 2030, but it is unclear whether this will translate into policy, as it goes outside of its mandate.

GMOs

What's needed?

The Farm to Fork strategy must explicitly phase out promotion of GM crops. It should also cancel an ongoing study on new genomic techniques, which was set up by the European Council after a request from the biotech lobby to exclude new GMOs from existing safety rules. [5] This would allow agribusiness corporations to bypass an ECJ ruling which clarified that a new generation of GM techniques must be subject to existing EU safety laws. [6]

What the leak says

Draft versions of the Strategy presented a study on new genomic techniques as a way to increase sustainability in the food chain. The draft does not also explicitly mention phasing out GM crops.

Industrial animal farming

What's needed?

The strategy must include a dedicated action plan towards less and better consumption and production of meat, dairy and eggs in the EU. [7]

The impact of industrial animal farming on the environment and small-scale sustainable producers is devastating. Animal farming accounts for between 12-17% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions [8], but as yet there is no coherent EU strategy to tackle it. Industrial animal farming is the biggest contributor to climate breakdown in the agricultural sector, and requires huge amounts of feed to be imported. [9]

What the leak says

The leaks of the Strategy indicate that instead it will focus on labelling schemes for food products, with no actions to reduce the impacts of industrial animal farming and the consumption of animal products on people and the planet.

Biodiversity Strategy

Nature

What's needed?

The status of the EU's valuable habitats and species is in decline. To fix this, the new Biodiversity Strategy needs to finalise the site designation of protected Natura 2000 areas, connect sites and - most of all - ensure their adequate protection and management.

What the leak says

The final plan is likely to commit to completing the Natura 2000 network and, together with nationally protected areas, aim to put 30% of land area under protection. It will also task the EU with setting up binding restoration targets for degraded habitats. Most importantly, it will boost pressure, funding and governance to make this work.

Consumption and trade

What's needed?

Growth-driven consumption and trade are among the main reasons for biodiversity loss. International trade - such as importing commodities like palm oil and soy - causes deforestation and forms a large part of the EU's ecological footprint. The Biodiversity Strategy needs to set up legally binding ecological and social requirements for imported

goods in order to create the conditions needed for sustainable production in producer regions.

It must also support the agreement of a UN treaty on transnational corporations and human rights. [10]

What the leak says

For the first time, the strategy includes ideas for how to regulate trade with respect to biodiversity. However, it seems as though the proposals will be voluntary rather than binding - meaning their impact is likely to be minimal.

The strategy is expected to integrate reporting obligations for biodiversity under the non-financial reporting directive. It will also promote tax systems and pricing to reflect real environmental costs and consider due diligence approaches.

Leaks of the strategy indicate that there will not be a reference to supporting the UN treaty on business and human rights.

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NOTES

[1] European Commission: [Farm to Fork Strategy](#)

This briefing is based on analysis of leaked drafts of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, as well as information published in Agrafacts on 6 May 2020.

[Biodiversity Strategy \(May 3\)](#)

[Farm to Fork Strategy \(March 2\)](#)

[2] [NGO letter on pesticide targets](#)

[Save Bees and Farmers ECI](#)

[3] [IPBES report on biodiversity and ecosystem services](#)

[4] European Commission: [EC study on new genomic techniques](#)

[5] European Seeds Association: [letter to the EU Council calling for weaker safety rules for new GMOs](#)

[6] Friends of the Earth Europe: [EU's top court confirms safety checks needed for new GMOs](#)

[7] Joint NGO letter: "[Less and better meat, dairy and eggs in the Farm to Fork Strategy](#)"

[8] EurActiv: [EU mustn't double down on broken farming](#)

[9] EurActiv: [EU protein plan - will the cure be worse than the disease?](#)

[10] [Campaign for a binding UN treaty on businesses and human rights](#)





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