

THE RE-CAP: Does the EU's new farming policy match the EU Green Deal goals?



Agriculture in the EU: where we could be vs. where we are

Farming in Europe stands at a crossroads.

All the building blocks for a resilient, sustainable and fair food production system are there. Thousands of small-scale sustainable producers have formed the backbone of food production in Europe for centuries, using environmentally-friendly farming practices like agroecology and organic farming to produce healthy food in a way that nourishes both people and the planet.

What is agroecology?

Agroecology is a system of food production based on ecological, social and political principles that value healthy and diverse agroecosystems and social networks, minimising of external inputs, secure livelihoods for producers, and nutritious food for consumers.¹

To transition to this fair and green food production model, Friends of the Earth Europe, as part of the Nyéléni Europe network, have long-called for several **fundamental changes to the way the EU produces and distributes food**². We call for a farming system that looks like:



A food system rooted in economic and political support for small-holder sustainable farmers.



Promotion of food sovereignty and agroecological practices that benefit biodiversity, soil health and the climate.



Protection of labour rights, decent working conditions and fair income.



Supports new entrants into the sector and strengthens local markets and shortened supply chains.

What is food sovereignty?

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.³

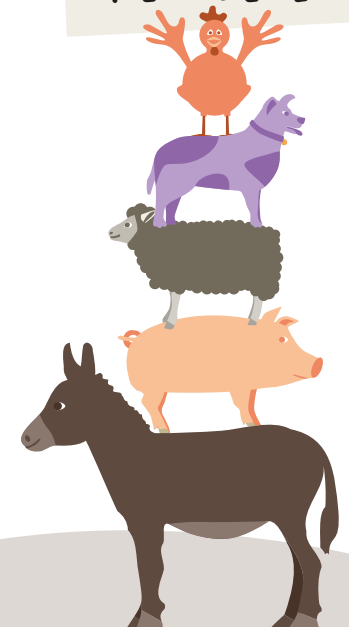
Securing this future for food production requires **an overhaul in the existing agriculture sector**. For decades, the globalisation and industrialisation of food production has put profit and maximising yields before anything else, with catastrophic impacts. This business model has driven skyrocketing global carbon emissions, biodiversity loss, pollution of soil and air, human rights violations and job insecurity, and small farmers pressured out of the market by unfair competition⁴.

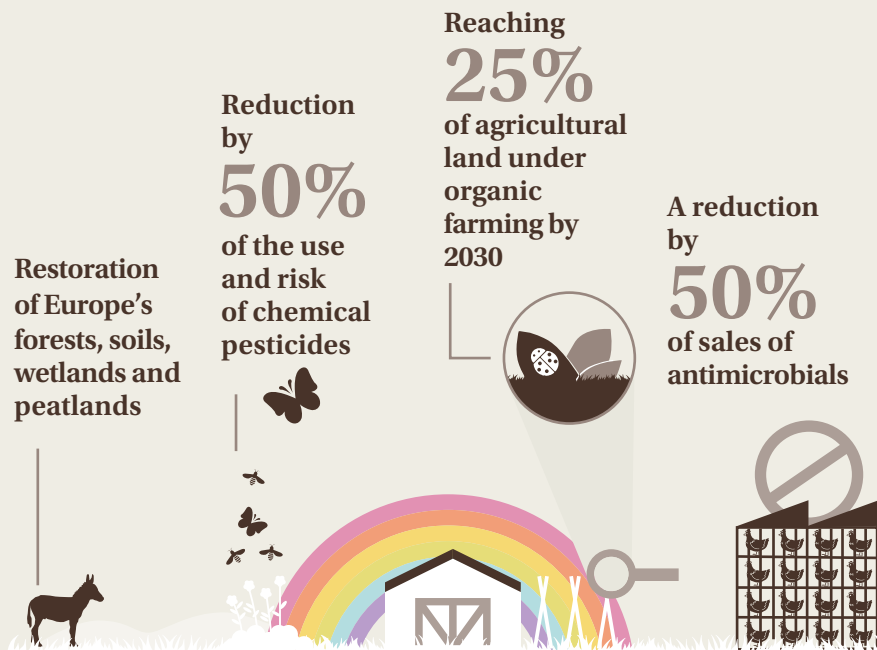
Enter the EU Green Deal

In 2019, the EU proposed one of the most important sets of proposals of our lifetime: the **EU Green Deal**⁵. The European Commission announced its plan to spend €1.8 trillion on reforming its climate, transport, energy and taxation policies to set the EU on the path to become the first carbon-neutral continent.

As part of this package of proposals, the European Commission introduced the **Farm to Fork Strategy**⁶. This is the set of policy objectives devoted to reforming Europe's food system to meet the EU Green Deal targets. The overarching EU Green Deal target is to achieve a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and reach net zero by 2050.

WE NEED
A GREEN
NEW DEAL





The Farm to Fork Strategy goals at a glance

A reduction of nutrient losses by at least **50%**

This will reduce the use of fertilisers by at least **20%** by 2030

The related EU Biodiversity Strategy also includes a related goal of a minimum 10% area under high diversity landscape features.

What does the CAP have to do with the Farm to Fork Strategy?

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the EU legislation which determines the funding and priorities of the food production sector. The CAP, which was last updated in 2021, uses up a third of the EU's budget and will distribute nearly €270 billion to over 6 million farmers⁷ from 2023-2027.

The CAP is a powerful piece of legislation that can make or break the goals of the Farm to Fork Strategy. Historically, the CAP has channelled billions of euros into propping up factory farms, exploitation and climate devastation⁸.

With its reformed CAP, the EU promised a "greener and fairer CAP" that prioritises the three tenets of sustainability (environmental, economic and social)⁹.

But how far does it really achieve the EU Green Deal targets? Let's dive into the details.

What are CAP funds used for?

There is a system to determine who gets CAP funds, and how much they get. The money also comes with certain conditions attached. The need-to-know:

- **CAP funding is split into two pillars.** Pillar 1 is the biggest, with up to €207.5 billion in funds being allocated for income support for farmers. The remaining €62.5 billion goes to promoting rural development¹⁰.
- Member states must spend at least 25% of their income support to 'eco-schemes,' which are voluntary schemes to foster practises that should be good for the environment, the climate or animal welfare.
- Member states must devote at least 10% of the **income support** to smaller farms.
- At least 3% of the spending must go to supporting **young farmers**.

What is an eco-scheme?

A new voluntary instrument for farmers who want to implement climate and environmentally-friendly practises (organic farming, agroecology, integrated pest management) as well as animal welfare measures¹¹. The criteria for eco-schemes established in the CAP are however **very broad and could include measures with no or limited environmental benefits**¹².



Most CAP subsidies are in the form of direct payments. This means that farms benefiting from the CAP will receive money whether they make use of eco-schemes or not.

It's now up to member states to create their own National Strategic Plans to determine how to use the funds in line with CAP spending criteria. Member states had to submit these plans by January 2022, and these will then be reviewed and agreed upon by the European Commission throughout the year, with the new CAP rules coming into force from 2023.

CAP and the Farm to Fork Strategy: the devil in the details

The CAP is supposed to be an instrument to achieve the EU Green Deal objectives, but **there are actually no binding requirements for the CAP to do this.** In fact, the initial proposals for the new CAP legislation were made in 2018, before the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy were even launched, meaning inconsistencies were inevitable from the start.

In 2020, ClientEarth lawyers warned the European Commission that the CAP proposals didn't align with the EU Green Deal and would undermine the targets if rushed through¹³. Scientists, NGOs and smallholder farmers stage countless protests during the reform process. The EU carried on anyway.

CAP and the EU Green Deal: Spot the difference

EU Green Deal target:

~~At least a 55% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030~~

CAP:

Over the last 6 years, the EU has funnelled around €100 billion into climate action measures in the CAP, but a review by the European Court of Auditors found that these measures have had little to no impact on reducing emissions¹⁴.

Achieving the EU emission reduction target means, among other things, **restoring natural lands that serve as rich carbon sinks like peatlands and grasslands**. Peatlands sequester a huge amount of carbon which is crucial for reaching the EU's net zero target, but when the land is not properly maintained, this carbon is released back into the air.

The new CAP includes some conditionality requirements for farmers to protect these areas by introducing a condition to maintain permanent grasslands and preserve carbon-rich soils, and extends eco-scheme eligibility to farmers practising agroforestry and techniques shown to sequester carbon in the soil.

However, these conditionality requirements are very weak and there are few incentives for farmers to take up these practises. On top of that, no member state so far has introduced any measures to sufficiently protect peatlands¹⁵.

There are also **no real ambitions in the new CAP to fundamentally tackle the most emitting sectors of our food systems**. For instance, there are no concrete measure to reduce industrial livestock production, one of the biggest contributor to greenhouse gases emissions¹⁶, nor to address the supply chains linked to it.

EU Green Deal target:

~~A minimum 10% of farmland area under high diversity landscape features~~

CAP:

The CAP specifies that a minimum 4% of land must be for 'non-productive' features, and this percentage can be topped by eco-schemes. But this requirement is **riddled with loopholes**: a third of farmland has been exempted, and it even allows for the inclusion of crop-growing (i.e. productive!) features¹⁷.

Again, member states are also lacking. No country has yet indicated any effective measures to address the climate and biodiversity targets of the Farm to Fork Strategy or EU Green Deal.

EU Green Deal target:

~~Reduction in pesticides by 50% & fertilisers by 20%~~

CAP:

There are some requirements for the 'sustainable use of pesticides' attached to CAP funds¹⁸, and eco-schemes cover fertiliser reduction. But once again, there is **little active incentive to take up these practises, and penalties for lack of compliance with the conditions are low**.

EU Green Deal target:

~~25% of Europe's farmland under organic farming~~

CAP:

The new CAP does include some provisions to increase eco-friendly farming practises. This is mainly in the form of eco-scheme support or second pillar funding available for organic farming and the introduction of crop rotation requirements, a practice which improves soil health.

However, once again, the CAP falls short. The lack of targeted support to incentivise organic farming means conventional farmers have **little motive or help to transition of their own accord**.

On top of that, the majority of member state national Strategic Plans allocate insufficient funding to achieve the organic farming target, while some countries have not submitted a plan for organic farming at all¹⁹.

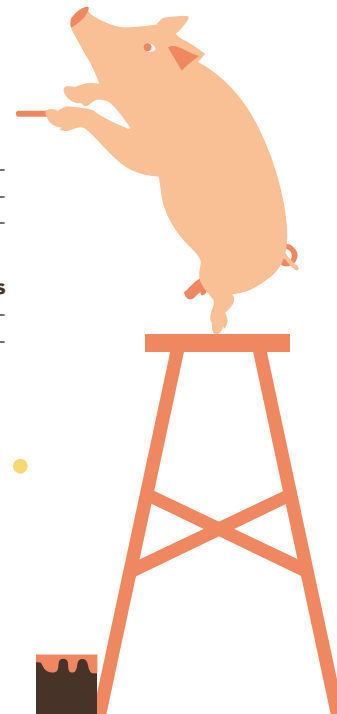
EU Green Deal target:

~~50% reduction in antimicrobials for livestock~~

CAP:

The new CAP, and the Farm to Fork Strategy, both ignore the elephant in the room: the most effective way to reduce the use of antimicrobials and cut agriculture emissions, is to stop funding industrialised agriculture, where these antimicrobials are most in demand.

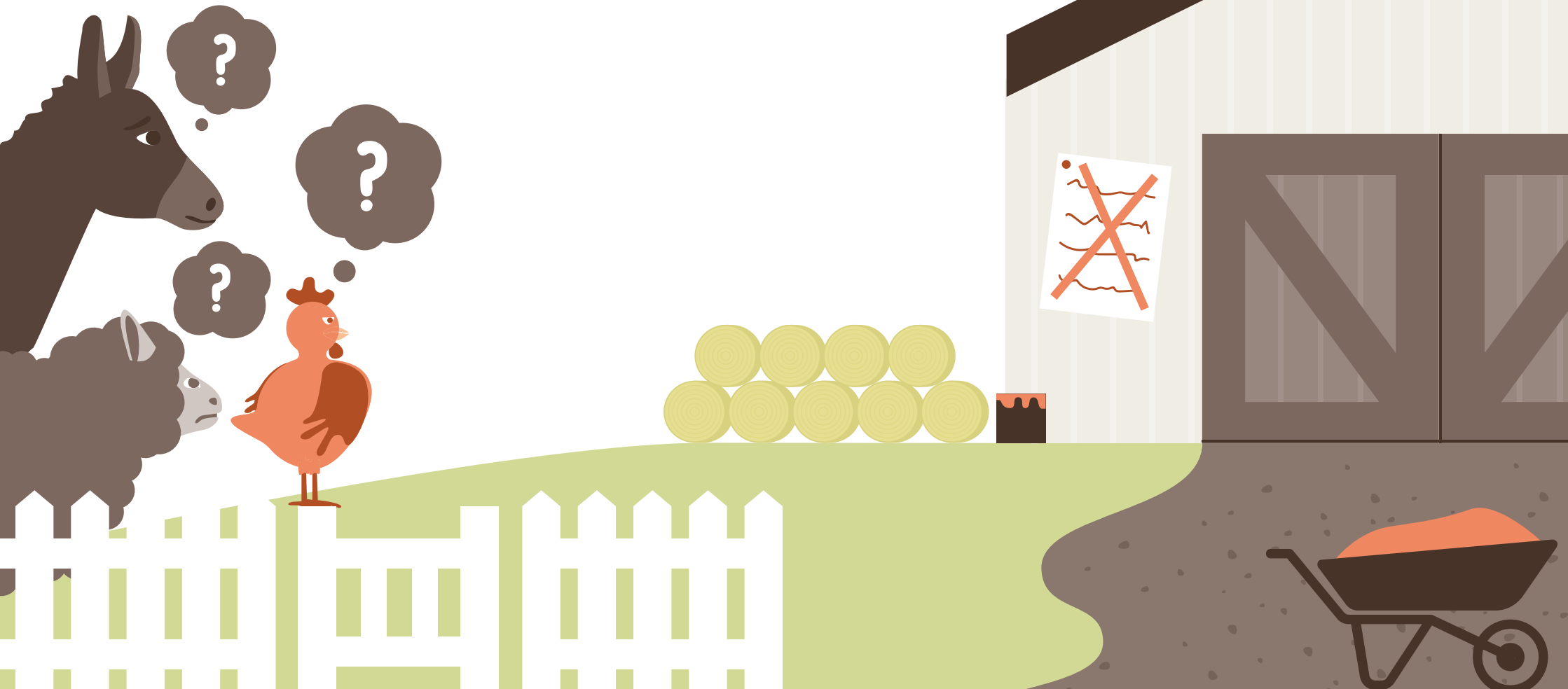
The CAP in fact achieves the opposite. **There are no eco-schemes or targets to reduce industrial livestock farming**. Instead payments are linked to the size of the farm, meaning giant polluting factory farms will continue to pocket the EU's so-called green budget.



So what's the verdict?

For a so-called green law, the CAP undermines the goals of the EU Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy. Funds to promote sustainable farming, reduce toxic pesticides and restore biodiversity and landscapes are reduced to optional add-ons, rather than sufficient mandatory conditions and funds. Conditions for eco-schemes are broad, penalties are low and measures to hold member states accountable are weak.

The CAP does not align with the EU Green Deal targets, targets which, in themselves, fall short of what is needed for a green and just transition. The gaps in the CAP are a laundry list of what effective legislation should have: binding measures for policy coherence across sectors, payments targeted at achieving climate and biodiversity goals and supporting smallholder farmers, and payment distributed away from factory farmers to small farmers.



What happens now?

The new CAP proposals met countless protests from scientists, NGOs and smallholder farmers alike. They went through anyway.

Member states now have the responsibility to create National Strategic Plans that go further than the weak CAP commitments, and use the funds available to subsidise measures that meet the EU Green Deal targets.

The European Commission should push for ambitious plans and hold member states accountable through effective monitoring systems and penalties to ensure coherence with the EU Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy, and a liveable future.



Endnotes

- 1 Adapted from <http://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Download-declaration-Agroecology-Nyeleni-2015.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Nyeleni-Europe-More-farmers-better-food.pdf>
- 3 Nyeleni (2007). Declaration of Nyeleni. <https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>
- 4 Around 85% of EU farms lost between 2005 and 2016 were small farms under 5 hectares. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Farms_and_farmland_in_the_European_Union_-_statistics
- 5 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en
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- 17 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/factsheet-cap-reform-to-fit-european-green-deal_en.pdf
- 18 Inclusion of elements of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32009L0128>
- 19 https://www.organicseurope.bio/content/uploads/2021/11/IFOAMEU_policy_CAP_externalbriefing_17112021.pdf?dd



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