

# Greening agriculture

The EU promotes sustainable and eco-friendly practices in food systems to protect the environment and people's health while improving the food sector's resilience.

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## A sustainable, resilient and healthy food system

The agri-food sector is a major economic sector in the EU.

The sector depends heavily on the environment but also has a considerable impact on it. Food production and its supply chain are a source of greenhouse gas emissions which cause **climate change**. Intensive farming can cause soil degradation and **biodiversity loss** owing to deforestation, the use of pesticides and other practices which do not respect the environment.

The EU is transforming the way food is produced and consumed in Europe to:

make farming and food systems **more sustainable**

strengthen **resilience** against crises

keep ensuring that food is **healthy and affordable**

By promoting sustainable practices, reducing emissions and pollution, and enhancing biodiversity, the EU is working toward a climate-resilient, environmentally friendly food system.

In addition, the EU wants to improve animal welfare, reduce food loss and waste, promote more sustainable food consumption and healthy diets and combat food fraud in the supply chain.

## Why should agriculture become greener?

Worldwide, a third of greenhouse gas emissions comes from food systems, according to the

methane, a third of greenhouse gas emissions comes from food systems, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Within the EU, agriculture accounts for almost 11% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions, which are principally from methane emissions from livestock and nitrous oxide from soils.

# one third

of the world's emissions come from food systems

Yet farming and forestry can play a key role in the fight against climate change by **absorbing carbon from the atmosphere**.

The **overuse of pesticides and antimicrobials** in farming is another challenge, with serious environmental and health consequences, leading to water pollution, soil degradation and the development of antimicrobial resistance.

60-70% of EU soils are considered unhealthy, according to the European Environment Agency. Impoverished soil and degraded agricultural ecosystems have a more **limited ability to produce food**.

## Key EU policies and legislation

The EU's approach to greening agriculture is embedded in various strategies and legislation.

The **European Green Deal**, adopted in 2019, is a package of environmental and climate policy initiatives. It sets the target of making Europe **climate-neutral by 2050**. Agriculture is a crucial part of this transition.

### Farm to fork strategy

The farm to fork strategy is one of the key actions under the European Green Deal. It intends to **shift the current EU food system towards a sustainable model**. The Council endorsed that goal in its October 2020 conclusions.

### Common agricultural policy

The common agricultural policy (CAP) has been reformed to support environmental and climate objectives more effectively. For 2023-2027, **40% of the CAP budget** is devoted to climate action.

### Biodiversity strategy

The biodiversity strategy is another core component of the Green Deal. It aims to restore ecosystems and reverse biodiversity loss, and **promotes agro-ecological practices**, including crop rotation and agroforestry.

### Nature restoration law

In line with the biodiversity strategy, the nature restoration law sets the first ever binding targets to restore ecosystems, habitats and species. The goal is also to enhance biodiversity and increase the **sustainability of agricultural land**.

These strategies and laws address a wide range of critical issues, from emission reduction and pesticide use to organic farming, animal welfare and food waste.

# More sustainable farming

The new CAP, in force since 2023, incentivises and requires farmers to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

**conditionality:** farms that receive direct payments from the CAP must protect wetland and peatlands and adopt crop rotation or diversification and soil cover practices

**eco-schemes:** if farmers go beyond the mandatory requirements they can receive additional payments from eco-schemes. At least 25% of direct payments is allocated to eco-schemes, a budget of €48.5 billion

**rural development:** further support comes from rural development programmes, offering financial support for farmers to implement environmental practices

Farmers can also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with **carbon farming** practices. These include actions to capture carbon from the atmosphere (carbon sequestration) and store it in soil or biomass, and to better manage soils to enhance its ability to store carbon.

[CAP funding rules 2023-2027](#)

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[Carbon removals](#)

## Restoring agricultural ecosystems

The nature restoration regulation, in force since August 2024, requests EU member states to take measures to:

**restore 30% of drained peatlands** under agricultural use by 2030, and 50% by 2050 (a lower percentage can apply for countries that are heavily affected)

enhance the carbon stock in mineral soils

increase high-diversity landscape features on agricultural land (such as hedgerows, flower strips, fallow land, ponds and fruit trees)



## Organic farming

Organic agriculture promotes environmentally friendly practices that minimise the use of fertilisers and pesticides, improve soil health, and enhance biodiversity.

Support for organic farming is embedded in the common agricultural policy.

Furthermore, an EU action plan on organic farming outlines a set of actions to achieve **25% organic farming by 2030**. In July 2021, Council ministers agreed on the conclusions on the action plan which the European Commission had presented in March 2021. The main points were:

organic farming is important for the sustainability of European agriculture

developing organic production helps secure incomes and create jobs

a balanced demand and supply of organic products ensures profitability for the sector

particularities and different situations in member states need be considered when defining targets and interventions

involving public and private stakeholders is crucial to achieving the strategy's goals

In addition, the **organic farming regulation** ensures high standards for organic production and certification, promoting transparency and consumer trust in organic products.

[Organic action plan \(European Commission\)](#)

## See also

[The common agricultural policy explained](#)

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[Food waste](#)

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[Food safety and health](#)

## Topics

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