

Sustainable management and innovation of agriculture and agro-food systems, the European Commission perspective

Europe is leading the fight against climate change, and agriculture must play a key role in this. Our farmers are not only among the most vulnerable to the effects of global warming, they are a vital part of the solution in the transition to a more sustainable and innovative agricultural model, under the environmental, social and economic dimension. The European Commission is here to support farmers and the agri-food sector in this transition. And the Common Agricultural Policy is a key tool in this regard

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by **María Angeles Benítez Salas**, *Acting Director-General at DG AGRI, European Commission*

Europe is leading the fight against climate change, and agriculture must play a key role in this. We cannot forget that our farmers are not only among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, they are a vital part of the solution in the transition to a more sustainable and innovative agricultural model. The European Commission is here to support farmers and the agri-food sector in this transition. The Common Agricultural Policy is a key tool in this regard. One of the first common European policies, it has de-

veloped since its introduction in 1962. Initially established to ensure food security in Europe, the CAP's priorities have since evolved to better respond to global challenges and local demands while keeping in mind its original objective.

The CAP is again at a crossroad: current and future challenges need to be addressed, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and ensuring a fair income for farmers. Therefore, in June 2018 the European Commission presented its proposals for the next CAP, aiming to modernise and simplify the

policy with a shift towards a performance and results-based model. **An important element of these proposals is the new 'green architecture', which reflects higher environmental and climate ambitions, and will be crucial in the transition towards a more sustainable agricultural sector.**

Beyond the CAP, the European Commission's environmental and climate aspirations have also been enshrined in the 'European Green Deal'. Presented in December 2019, the Green Deal is a roadmap for making the EU's economy sustainable by turning climate and en-



environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas and making the transition just and inclusive for all. **Regarding agriculture, the ‘Farm to fork strategy’ is the section of the Green Deal that will be the most relevant. Its aim is to design a fair, healthy and more climate and environmental-friendly food system. The EU is currently renowned for producing food with some of the highest standards for nutrition, quality and safety in the world. The ‘Farm to fork strategy’ will contribute to make it among the most sustainable ones.**

It is important to remember the three dimensions of sustainability – environmental, social and economic. If we want to achieve this transition, we will have to take all three into account, leaving no one behind. This is where the CAP can play a crucial role, as it is already contributing to the three dimensions. Our proposals are compatible with the Farm to fork strategy’s greater ambitions, thanks to its flexibility and new green architecture.

Starting with nine CAP objectives at the EU level, each Member State will design national CAP strategic plans explaining how they will achieve these objectives based on their local needs, conditions and specific agricultural context. The European Commission will review these plans on a yearly basis to ensure that results are

heading towards the achievement of the objectives.

As a basis to the green architecture, all farmers receiving CAP income support will have to comply with a set of good farming practices and standards (the so called “conditionality”), built upon and more ambitious than the current system composed of cross-compliance and greening. For example, these mandatory practices include having permanent pastures, establishing buffer strips along watercourses, crop rotation and preserving carbon rich soils.

On top of that, the CAP proposals introduce a new element, the ‘eco-schemes’. These will be mandatory for member states to propose, voluntary for farmers to join, and aim to increase the national environmental and climate-care actions. The idea is to reward farmers for going even further in the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices.

Finally, under the rural development framework are the agri-environment-climate measures (AECMs). Similarly, they aim to restore, preserve and enhance ecosystems, promote resource efficiency, and move towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. These interventions could include environmentally friendly production systems such as agroecology and agroforestry, forest environmental and climate services, precision farming

methods and organic farming.

Organic farming is recognised as a sustainable agricultural practice, benefitting the environment, the preservation of biodiversity and our ecosystems. It has been growing at an exceptional rate: in the last ten years, the organic farming area has increased by 70%. It now represents 7.5% of total agricultural land in the EU.

To be presented later this year, an organic farming action plan will complement the new regulation that will enter into force in January 2021. It will be organised around three key angles: to enhance the role of organic farming in the fight against climate change, including sustainable resource management and the protection of biodiversity; to stimulate demand for organic products while maintaining consumer trust; and to increase organic farming area in the EU.

Overall, agriculture will be a key partner in the move towards climate neutrality. For instance, farmers and foresters can contribute to the increase of carbon sequestration. In addition, technology and innovation have already started to change the agricultural landscape: from publically available satellite data to precision farming tools, a more efficient use of natural resources is possible while improving production. However, innovation does not only include digital and technological advances. With a better understanding of how nature and ecosystems work, of how plants, animals and trees interact, innovative sustainable farming systems can be designed, based on these interactions.

The European Commission will support the sector and its actors, by making the right tools available –mostly available through the CAP - but also by investing heavily in research and innovation to continue and further develop sustainable agricultural systems. Finally, the key step will be to make this knowledge widely available and accessible, and filling the digital divide.