

'Farm to Fork' strategy: Striving for healthy and sustainable food

Launched on 20 May 2020, the 'Farm to Fork' strategy put forward the EU's ambition for making its food system a model of sustainability at all stages of the food value chain. Ahead of the desired engagement of institutions, stakeholders and citizens in a broad debate, the strategy is already high on the agri-food community's agenda.

Background

On 11 December 2019, the European Commission presented '[The European Green Deal](#)', a roadmap for sustainability that [envisaged](#) a 'Farm to Fork' strategy on sustainable food, to address priorities and challenges related to every step in the food chain. Many citizens and stakeholders contributed to the Commission's [consultation](#) on a sustainable food strategy in February/March 2020. Initially planned for the end of March, the launch of the strategy was delayed due to the outbreak of the coronavirus. This change of plans raised lively [debate](#) among stakeholders and policy-makers on whether the strategy should be further [delayed](#) or [not](#). In the end, the idea prevailed that the current environmental and climate emergencies, and a need for a resilient food system evoked by the crisis, do not permit additional delays.

A long-awaited and highly anticipated strategy finally unveiled

On 20 May 2020, the Commission adopted its communication on '[A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system](#)', accompanied by an [action plan](#) that put forward 27 legislative and non-legislative measures over a timespan running from 2020 to 2024 (with a review by mid-2023).

The strategy includes elements that have been on the agri-food policy agenda for a while, from the use of pesticides to food labelling, as well as aspects stirred up by the [weaknesses](#) of the [EU's food chain](#) revealed by the coronavirus crisis. Food security (largely taken for granted in the EU in recent times, except for the most deprived) becomes one of the strategy's dimensions, along with the environmental impact of food production and supply, and food affordability in a fair economic environment. The strategy envisages a proposal for a legislative framework on a sustainable food system and, in light of the [lessons](#) learned during the coronavirus crisis, the set-up of a contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis. A revamped agricultural crisis reserve ([never used](#) so far in its current format) would also help to mitigate future agricultural market crises.

The strategy covers all steps taken by the food from production to consumption. Given the role of [agricultural policy](#) in achieving both environmental and climate goals, a host of actions (summed up in the box to the right) aim at making EU [agriculture](#) (and [fisheries](#)) more sustainable, while supporting farmers (and fishermen). Actions include quantifiable targets for 2030, roadmaps for action and policy tuning (this latter, through [identified](#) steps for aligning the common agricultural policy (CAP) reform proposals with the Green Deal's ambitions).

'Farm to Fork' moves for healthy and sustainable food production

Targets for 2030

- 50 % cut in the [use and risk](#) of chemical [pesticides](#) and in the use of more hazardous pesticides.
- 20 % at least reduced use of [fertilisers](#).
- 50 % cut of EU sales of [antimicrobials](#) for farmed animals and in aquaculture.
- 25 % at least of [organically](#) farmed area and a significant increase in organic [aquaculture](#).

Other areas of action

- Rewarded [CO₂ sequestration](#) on farms.
- [Bioeconomy](#) and [energy efficiency](#).
- [Animal welfare](#) and [plant health](#).
- Sustainable production in the [farm animal](#) and fish and seafood sectors.
- Integration of the [nine objectives](#) of the common agricultural policy (CAP) in the Member States' [CAP strategic plans](#).
- Competition rules and unfair trading practices ([UTPs](#)).

EPRS 'Farm to Fork' strategy: Striving for healthy and sustainable food

Moving forward in the food value chain, the strategy calls on all actors (processors, service operators, retailers, and consumers) to take action, and outlines a number of initiatives (see box to the right) for a sustainable food system. As no food strategy can make it without lining up [people's attitude](#) towards food ethics with their consumption habits, key actions aim at facilitating consumers in making informed food choices for healthy and sustainable diets.

For enabling the sustainability transition, the strategy relies on [research and innovation](#) (on natural resources, bioeconomy, etc.), targeted investments (such as on broadband for mainstreaming the use of [technology](#)), and better data use (statistics on [farm sustainability](#), monitoring data, SMEs' skills). Finally, as European food is already a [global](#) standard for food, it should also promote the global transition to sustainable food supply, through international cooperation and trade.

Stakeholders' diverging reactions

The Commission aims to involve stakeholders and citizens in a broad debate on the strategy, the launch of which has already prompted much debate in the agri-food community. Reactions range from emphasising its positive aspects, at times despite negative [expectations](#), to raising doubts or criticism. In general, ecologist NGOs welcomed the strategy as a timely potential [game-changer](#) to [save the planet](#) from destructive practices, and as a shift towards [sustainable future policies](#), though commitments are still [just aspirational](#). Others see it as a [first real attempt](#) at an EU food policy that favours [biodiversity and health](#) over agribusiness profits, aims at [empowering consumers](#) to make informed [healthy food choices](#), and can offer opportunities to [food and drink sector SMEs](#) hit by the crisis. This entails changes in production and consumption [patterns](#), including [alternative proteins](#) for food and feed. Critics emphasise the lack of a scientific approach, such as in the case of the farming sector's claims that certain proposals lacking an impact assessment would [endanger](#) EU agriculture and [mislead](#) consumers. Sector stakeholders question targets on pesticides as [unrealistic](#) and those on fertilisers as [too ambitious](#), whereas targets on [organic farming](#) would be achievable by rewarding organic conversion. Others regret the absence of issues such as [access to land](#), or consider [new farm policy](#) proposals are needed. In certain views, meat production and consumption are not adequately [addressed](#) by the strategy, despite being a [main societal challenge](#). On the other hand, the meat sector warns about [simplistic](#) measures putting off meat consumption and recalls meat's important [place](#) in the EU's rural economy and eating habits, and as a key component of [circular](#) food systems. Think-tanks generally welcome a strategy that identifies the [conditions](#) for reaching sustainable food systems, but warn that [broad support](#) for its realisation is essential, in particular for overcoming its intrinsic [limitations](#).

The starting point of EU interinstitutional talks

Putting forward a framework for legislative and non-legislative initiatives that the European Parliament and Council will contribute to shaping, the European Commission invited the co-legislators to endorse the 'Farm to Fork' strategy and contribute to implementing it. In [Parliament](#), first reactions have mirrored Members' different policy angles and political ideas, though the need for [rethinking](#) the EU's food system is a common view. Commissioners in charge of steering the [strategy](#) regularly participate in meetings with Parliament's committees dealing with [environment](#), public health and food security, and [agriculture](#). In Council, early [discussions](#) have highlighted the main challenges and opportunities for EU Member States in achieving the strategy's targets, such as the budgetary aspects and the differences in the initial positions at country level.

On 15 January 2020, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the Green Deal. Noting that food production is still the biggest driver of biodiversity loss, and that providing safe, healthy and good quality food for all should be a top priority, Parliament welcomed the Commission presenting a 'Farm to Fork' strategy to tackle such issues.

'Farm to Fork' moves for healthy and sustainable food supply and consumption

Actions in the food chain

- EU code of conduct for responsible business and marketing practice.
- Sustainable corporate governance and [circular](#) business models.
- Food nutrient profile, [packaging](#) and marketing standards.
- Combating [food fraud](#).

Actions on food consumption

- Information to consumers ([harmonised](#) front-of-pack [labelling](#): nutritional, 'green' and social claims; [origin](#) mark).
- Sustainable food [promotion](#) and procurement, and tax incentives.
- Targets to reduce food loss and [waste](#), and revision of date marking ('use by' and 'best before' dates).

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