



2021/2006(INI)

14.7.2021

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on an EU strategy to reduce methane emissions
(2021/2006(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion (*): Asger Christensen

(*) Associated committee – Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Regrets the lack of a comprehensive EU monitoring framework for methane emissions, notably in the agricultural sector, which offers the second-highest overall methane-emission reduction potential of any sector and where the sources of methane emissions are often diffuse, making measurement, reporting and verification challenging;
2. Highlights that some existing monitoring systems already allow us to take action; welcomes the Commission's initiative to develop, in cooperation with international partners, an International Methane Emissions Observatory with a view to achieving a more dynamic system that more accurately assesses the weight of methane emitted by, among other sources, ruminant livestock, and revising methane's global warming potential (GWP), which is a measurement system that statistically assesses the methane emitted over 100 years and whose results overestimate the impact of short-lived gases such as a methane;
3. Calls on the Commission, furthermore, to improve the measurement, reporting and verification of methane emissions in the agricultural sector, in which further disaggregation of emission factors and their determination on a scientific basis is required for all EU production systems; encourages the Commission and the Member States to support and apply available mitigation technologies and practices that have the potential to reduce emissions by taking full advantage of digital tools and the latest scientific developments, while avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy for farmers;
4. Welcomes the Commission's communication of 14 October 2020 on an EU strategy to reduce methane emissions (COM(2020)0663) as a milestone in the governance of non-CO₂ greenhouse gases in the Union; highlights that global anthropogenic emissions make up 59 % of all methane emissions¹;
5. Recalls the significant impact of the agricultural sector on methane emissions, in that it accounts for 53% of all anthropogenic methane emissions, and takes note of the fact that 26 % of anthropogenic methane emissions originate from waste and 19 % from energy;
6. Underlines, however, that the EU's greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from European agriculture (including livestock) saw a reduction of 22.2 % between 1990 and 2018 in the EU-28², due to a reduction in agricultural emissions of methane by 21 % (enteric fermentation by 22 % and manure management by 17 %); notes in this regard that since 2005 EU agriculture has not contributed to the global temperature increase;
7. Stresses, in addition, that most methane emissions occur outside the EU; calls, therefore, on the Commission to clarify the contribution of EU agriculture to the EU's

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/eu_methane_strategy.pdf

² European Environment Agency – <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/data-viewers/greenhouse-gases-viewer>

anthropogenic methane emissions and to differentiate this share from that of the world's agriculture;

8. Notes that biogenic methane is a short-lived gas that differs from CO₂ in its impact on global warming and can be more potent ad interim in terms of its effect on global warming; highlights, in addition, that the impact of biogenic methane emissions on global warming will be neutral if emissions are reduced by 0.33 % annually³;
9. Points out, furthermore, that methane emissions from agriculture should be regarded differently from methane emissions from processing fossil fuels;
10. Considers, therefore, that they should not be accounted for in the same way, and notes that the impact of biogenic methane on global temperature according to the emission accounting method can be significantly overstated;
11. Calls on the Commission, therefore, to adopt a model based on actual global warming impact rather than on emission inputs, in line with the Paris Agreement; also calls on the Commission to explore the development of a methane efficiency index that would compare kilos of methane generated per unit of output produced for different agricultural products; calls on the Commission, moreover, to take into account the difference between biogenic and fossil methane emissions when designing the methane strategy; stresses that applying a CO₂ equivalent is an inappropriate means to measure methane emissions;
12. Calls on the Commission to define policies and synergistic measures to encourage, support and incentivise the improved climatic performance of agricultural and livestock production through reductions in methane emissions that would lead to cooling effects;
13. Calls, therefore, for regulatory measures based on national and regional specificities and production systems for emissions from agriculture and related land use as part of the 'Fit for 55' package in order to achieve ambitious reductions in all GHG emissions in these sectors in the EU;
14. Welcomes in this context the Commission's announcement of the revision of the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) to reflect the increased carbon reduction targets through increased incentives to decrease methane emissions, for example, through specific, dedicated eco-schemes and carbon farming initiatives under the new common agricultural policy (CAP) and through other funding streams, private or public; urges the Commission to ensure positive synergies between climate regulation, the Industrial Emissions Directive and the NEC Directive to avoid double regulation; acknowledges the need to establish an accurate baseline for agricultural emissions; points out the need for harmonised calculation methods for methane and a regulatory framework that incentivises progressive reductions in methane emissions to deliver on climate objectives;
15. Notes that the use of a CO₂ equivalent is an inappropriate measure for methane emissions;

³ Lynch, J. et al., 'Demonstrating GWP*: a means of reporting warming-equivalent emissions that captures the contrasting impacts of short- and long-lived climate pollutants', *Environmental Research Letters*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2020; <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab6d7e>

16. Stresses the important role of the agricultural sector in offering many solutions for tackling climate change and supporting the EU strategy to reduce and valorise methane emissions;
17. Underlines the importance of recognising the progress made by the agri-food sector in offsetting emissions and restoring soil fertility; highlights that further investment and scientific research in practical conditions and in mitigation measures and technologies is of paramount importance;
18. Calls on the Commission to develop and update an inventory of best practices for the farming sector, in line with the latest technologies and in cooperation with farmers, stakeholders, Member States, and local, regional and national authorities;
19. Supports stimulating the uptake of regenerative agricultural practices, improving access to technologies, data, training and information, and diversifying farmers' income through payments for ecosystem services, thereby increasing their resilience;
20. Considers that there is great potential in breeding, genetics, integrated manure management and the treatment of emissions from slurry, and also in adapting diet and developing feed additives for ruminant and bovine species, in line with the latest fact-based evidence and peer-reviewed science and with animal welfare standards, which can reduce methane emissions without decreasing livestock production, as this production is vital to preserving rural communities and provides a source of employment;
21. Stresses that future policy decisions need to provide a clear framework for the livestock sector to ensure a degree of predictability;
22. Stresses that decreased livestock production could be incompatible with the objective of ensuring European food security; acknowledges that good livestock management practices can lead to a 30 % decrease in GHG emissions⁴;
23. Highlights that with a view to the economic sustainability of EU farms, we should focus on the sustainable production of both plant- and animal-based products as they all constitute an important part of a balanced human diet;
24. Emphasises, in addition, the opportunities presented by measures related to farm management, such as the optimal rearing of young livestock which has the potential to reduce methane emissions at farm level;
25. Welcomes the Commission's plans to revise the Feed Additives Regulation to streamline the current costly and inflexible authorisation process, and considers that technical mitigation measures will complement other significant advances in the livestock sector in rural areas in line with the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy;
26. Welcomes the Commission's study on the status of new genomic techniques (NGT) and strongly supports the finding that NGTs have the potential to contribute to a more sustainable food system; highlights also that the study puts forward opportunities and benefits for the livestock sector, calls for the legal framework for these biotechnologies

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7089en/ca7089en.pdf>

to be adapted to the latest scientific and technological developments, and considers that targeted research within the Horizon Europe programme and the Economic Resilience Initiative (ERI) Fund is needed in this regard;

27. Underlines the importance of access to efficient production methods with low emissions per product unit;
28. Considers that value-added use of agricultural residues and other by-products could be an important driver of the sustainable circular economy and bio-economy, while recognising food production as a primary source of income for farmers;
29. Recalls, in this regard, that in order to meet new environmental targets, a balance of plant and animal production should be maintained, which will ensure sufficient nutrients and organic matter in EU soils, thereby having a positive influence on biodiversity;
30. Calls for the sustainable acceleration of European biogas production from agricultural waste as an important tool to reduce methane emissions and increase circularity in the agricultural sector and as a source of renewable energy; finds that renewable energy obtained through agricultural residues has significant potential and should be explored through further research and investment and a supportive policy framework to encourage farmers to install agricultural residue technology on farms and ensure access to national energy networks, including community manure and slurry management;
31. Highlights the need for agricultural support schemes to encourage sustainable biogas production and business at farm level, for example by providing energy to local customers and reducing energy transmission and distribution losses, both of which contribute to the improvement of the national energy system and reduce its operating costs;
32. Underlines the importance of giving farmers continuous access to investment support for biogas production;
33. Calls for better coordination and improved infrastructure between farmers and renewable energy producers in order to enable the uptake of locally connected biogas production; calls on the Commission to include in its forthcoming Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas cross-sector cooperative approaches with and among farmers and local communities; notes that the development of the circular and bio-economy can create more jobs in primary production and stresses that the bio-economy requires new skills, new knowledge and new disciplines to be developed and/or integrated further in training and education in this sector in order to tackle bio-economy-related societal changes, promote competitiveness, growth and job creation, meet the needs of the sector and ensure that skills and jobs are better matched;
34. Welcomes the Commission's announcement of the establishment of an expert group with the aim of analysing the life-cycle methane emissions matrix;
35. Considers that voluntary, minimum-bureaucracy farm-level certification schemes for climate-effective farming, including common measurement and verification data for methane reductions, will be an important tool for monitoring and incentivising methane reductions at farm level; stresses that such a scheme must be based on a broad body of peer-reviewed science, and must be assessed and approved by the Commission;

36. Calls on the Commission to submit a report on measures to support climate-efficient farming and food production by means of third-party certification and to publish an inventory of best practice measures;
37. Highlights the need to assess not just the impact on methane emissions of specific livestock management practices, animal welfare choices, and intensive or pastoral farming choices, but also the impact of supplementing the animal diet with feed additives on animal health, pest resilience, food safety (toxicity), productivity, product quality and the environment; acknowledges the differences between Member States in livestock manure handling practices and highlights the benefit of advisory services and the exchange of best practices;
38. Recognises that livestock grazing can play a central role in the mitigation of GHGs, while taking into account the specific nature of enteric methane emissions linked to the consumption of grass by ruminants and the need to distinguish short-cycle biogenic carbon from long-cycle carbon from fossil resource extraction in the light of recent research⁵; highlights the role of permanent grassland for carbon sequestration and recognises the full potential of woodlands and grasslands for climate action; underlines that carbon storage by grasslands compensates up to 45 %⁶ of GHG emissions and underlines the need to integrate the carbon stored by grasslands and their capacity not to release carbon in order to better assess the mitigation potential of agriculture;
39. Urges the Commission to support Member States in the collection of data regarding the carbon sequestration potential of grassland in order to allow for a more targeted approach to climate policy;
40. Acknowledges that animal production is the key activity on permanent grassland, allowing for the survival, economic stability and existence of rural farms in hill and mountain regions, thus preventing the overgrowth of such areas; calls on the Commission to focus investment efforts on funding innovation in methane inhibitors, including those for pasture-based systems, and to collaborate with third countries involved in similar research;
41. Underlines that reducing European livestock production to fight climate change runs the risk of exporting GHG emissions and accepting lower animal health and welfare standards, leading to a shift in production towards other parts of the world and to the abandonment of certain land which can only be used for grazing and which constitutes a rich source of biodiversity, which would have environmental, social and economic repercussions on EU rural regions and landscapes;
42. Emphasises the importance of agriculture in capturing and storing carbon;
43. Notes the important role of a wider circular economy and that the uptake of progressive CO₂ emission removal and the increased circularity of carbon should be incentivised, while avoiding additional pressure on the price of agricultural land which would be to

⁵ <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-08/documents/biogenic-co2-accounting-framework-report-sept-2011.pdf>;

<https://clear.ucdavis.edu/explainers/biogenic-carbon-cycle-and-cattle>;

<https://clear.ucdavis.edu/explainers/why-methane-cattle-warms-climate-differently-co2-fossil-fuels>

⁶ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n_proj_id=5355

the detriment of young farmers;

44. Calls on the Commission, in accordance with the EU Climate Law, to explore the development of a regulatory framework for the certification of carbon removal based on robust and transparent carbon accounting, which takes into account the differences between GHGs, verifies the authenticity of carbon removal, and supports and rewards farmers with incentives for their mitigation efforts; recalls also the importance of nature-based solutions for increasing natural carbon sinks in accordance with the EU Climate Law; calls on Member States to promote the uptake of mitigation technologies and biogas production using agricultural waste through wider deployment in their national strategic plans, but notes that farmers should also be able to rely on types of support other than that from the CAP;
45. Believes that replacing more expensive, but climate-compatible, domestic production with cheaper, incompatible imports cancels out the green transition in the CAP and increases imports with lower sustainability standards and a higher carbon footprint;
46. Points out that in agriculture a significant share of global methane emissions originates outside the EU and calls on the Commission to ensure that food continues to be produced in the most environmentally sustainable locations; emphasises the need for the EU to take the lead in exchanges of best practices with its third countries' trading partners with the aim of reducing methane emissions from agriculture; stresses the importance of international cooperation for reducing methane emissions;
47. Calls on the Commission to estimate the contribution of imported agri-food products to EU anthropogenic methane emissions through the EDGAR-FOOD database;
48. Stresses that our trade policy must be consistent with our environmental objectives in order to ensure that our efforts are not in vain; highlights the fact that the overall strategy for reducing emissions from livestock farming must also take into account possible effects on international agricultural trade and the possible transfer of emissions to third countries;
49. Recognises the importance of voluntary industry initiatives aimed at reducing methane emissions and considers that any regulatory initiatives should build upon best practices from existing voluntary actions and must be duly preceded by thorough impact assessments;
50. Points out that the share of non-EU emissions is expected to further increase; stresses that EU action must be embedded in a global approach;
51. Urges that the measures taken must not hamper EU competitiveness;
52. Notes that one-off and irreversible methane emissions in particular, such as from thawing Siberian permafrost, must be given fundamental importance.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	13.7.2021
Result of final vote	+: 36 -: 8 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Mazaly Aguilar, Clara Aguilera, Atidzhe Alieva-Veli, Álvaro Amaro, Eric Andrieu, Attila Ara-Kovács, Carmen Avram, Adrian-Dragoş Benea, Mara Bizzotto, Daniel Buda, Isabel Carvalhais, Asger Christensen, Angelo Ciocca, Ivan David, Paolo De Castro, Jérémy Decerle, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, Luke Ming Flanagan, Martin Häusling, Martin Hlaváček, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Jarosław Kalinowski, Elsi Katainen, Gilles Lebreton, Norbert Lins, Colm Markey, Alin Mituţa, Marlene Mortler, Ulrike Müller, Maria Noichl, Juozas Olekas, Pina Picierno, Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, Bronis Ropé, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Anne Sander, Petri Sarvamaa, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Veronika Vrecionová, Sarah Wiener, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Substitutes present for the final vote	Anja Hazekamp, Pär Holmgren, Sylvia Limmer

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

36	+
ECR	Mazaly Aguilar, Krzysztof Jurgiel, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Veronika Vrecionová
ID	Mara Bizzotto, Angelo Ciocca, Gilles Lebreton
PPE	Álvaro Amaro, Daniel Buda, Salvatore De Meo, Herbert Dorfmann, Jarosław Kalinowski, Norbert Lins, Colm Markey, Marlene Mortler, Anne Sander, Petri Sarvamaa, Simone Schmiedtbauer, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Renew	Atidzhe Alieva-Veli, Asger Christensen, Jérémy Decerle, Martin Hlaváček, Elsi Katainen, Alin Mituța, Ulrike Müller
S&D	Clara Aguilera, Eric Andrieu, Attila Ara-Kovács, Carmen Avram, Adrian-Drașoș Benea, Isabel Carvalhais, Paolo De Castro, Juozas Olekas, Pina Picierno

8	-
ID	Ivan David
S&D	Maria Noichl
The Left	Luke Ming Flanagan, Anja Hazekamp
Verts/ALE	Martin Häusling, Pär Holmgren, Bronis Ropė, Sarah Wiener

2	0
ID	Sylvia Limmer
The Left	Eugenia Rodríguez Palop

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention