Creating a sustainable food system: the EU's strategy

The EU's food sustainability strategy aims to protect the environment and ensure healthy food for everyone, whilst ensuring farmers' livelihoods.

The food system, from production to consumption and waste, has a significant impact on the environment, health and food safety. With the Farm to Fork Strategy presented on 20 May 2020, the European Commission aims to create a sustainable EU food system that safeguards food security and protects people and the natural world.

Setting targets

The strategy provides the framework for a series of laws that the Commission will propose, ranging from a revision of EU pesticides legislation, new EU animal welfare rules and plans to address food waste and tackle food fraud to food labelling, a carbon farming initiative and the reform of the EU farm system.

It will complement existing EU legislation and build a comprehensive framework that covers the whole food supply chain.

All the proposals will need to be negotiated with and approved by the Council and Parliament.

The strategy's key goals for 2030:

• 50% reduction in the use and risk of pesticides
• at least 20% reduction in the use of fertilisers
• 50% reduction in sales of antimicrobials used for farmed animals and aquaculture
• 25% of agricultural land to be used for organic farming

Creating an eco-friendly food system
Although EU agriculture is the only major farm sector worldwide to have reduced its greenhouse gas emissions (by 20% since 1990), it still accounts for about 10% of greenhouse gas emissions (of which 70% are due to animals) Together with manufacturing, processing, packaging and transportation, the food sector is one the main drivers of climate change.

According to the strategy, a shift in our way of producing, buying and consuming food is necessary to improve the environmental footprint and help mitigate climate change, whilst protecting the livelihoods of all economic actors in the food chain, by generating fairer economic returns and opening up new business opportunities.

The Farm to Fork Strategy is part of the European Green Deal and its goal of making the EU climate neutral by 2050, which is closely linked to the new Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms.

It aims to make the EU food system more robust and resilient to future crises like Covid-19 and more recurrent natural disasters such as floods or droughts.

Find out how the EU supports farmers through the CAP.

**Ensuring affordable, healthy and sustainable food**

The Farm to Fork Strategy intends to ensure affordable safe and nutritious food for consumers. It responds to increasing demands for healthy and environmentally friendly products.
According to a Eurobarometer survey from April 2021, around a third of Europeans buy and eat more organic food (32%), buy and eat less meat (31%), while 16% consider the carbon footprint of their food purchases and sometimes adapt their shopping accordingly.

Consumption patterns are changing, but with more than 950,000 deaths in 2017 related to unhealthy diets and half of adults being overweight, there is room for improvement. To make it easier to choose healthy options and make informed decisions, the Commission proposes a mandatory harmonised front-of-pack nutrition labelling system.

Leading a global transition

The EU is the number one importer and exporter of agri-food products worldwide and the largest seafood market. European food is of the highest global standard and the strategy aims to promote a global transition to sustainability in cooperation with partners and through trade agreements.

Parliament, a strong defender of sustainability

Parliament welcomed the EU's farm to fork strategy in a resolution adopted in October 2021 but added recommendations to make it even more sustainable. Parliament specifically highlighted that the Fit for 55 package should include ambitious targets for emissions from agriculture and related land use. In addition to mandatory front-of-pack nutritional labels, they want the Commission to address the overconsumption of meat and highly processed foods by regulating advertising, encouraging product reformulation and setting maximum levels of sugar, fats and salt in certain processed foods.

MEPs also want to cut pesticide use to better protect pollinators and biodiversity. They called again for an end to the use of cages in EU animal farming. Parliament supports the target of increased land use for organic farming by 2030 but said measures are needed to stimulate consumer demand.

Herbert Dorfmann (EPP, Italy), the MEP in charge of this file on behalf of the agriculture committee, said: “Ensuring the availability of food at reasonable prices must continue to be a priority”, while Anja Hazekamp (The Left, the Netherlands), the MEP in charge on behalf of the environment, public health and food safety committee, said: “a sustainable food system is also crucial for the future of farmers”.

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