

'From Farm to Fork' strategy on sustainable food

The 'Farm to Fork' strategy is one of the initiatives announced in President Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines for the new Commission, as part of the European Green Deal. It aims at creating a sustainable food value chain through legislative and non-legislative actions to be presented in spring 2020.

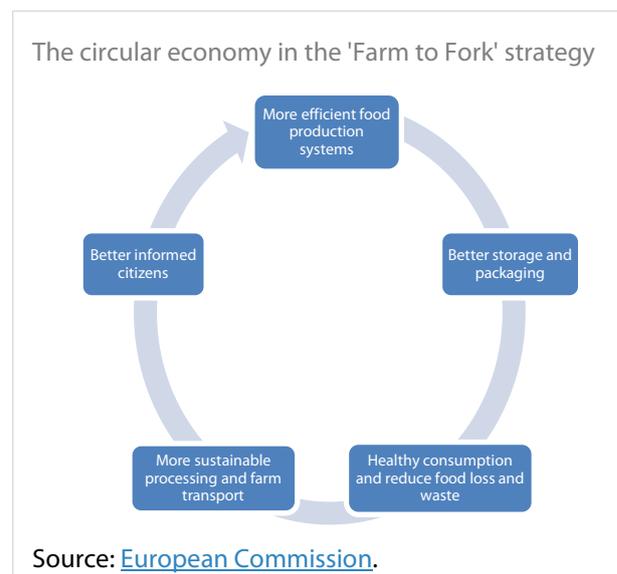
Background

The impacts of agriculture on the environment and the climate are increasingly in the spotlight. Farming intensification leads to the overuse and pollution of natural resources. The release of polluting substances – such as pesticides and fertilisers – and the greenhouse gas emissions from intensive livestock farming are perhaps the most well-known negative impacts of food production on the environment. Yet, farmers are among the first victims of biodiversity loss, soil impoverishment, and water shortages – not to mention of the increasing frequency of extreme weather events due to climate change. The gradual greening of the EU's agricultural policy over recent decades has contributed to mitigating these issues. The increasing budget allocated to environmental measures – complemented by a regulatory framework for issues such as the use of chemicals, animal welfare, and food safety – has helped achieve considerable improvements and establish leading global standards. As an example, greenhouse gas emissions from the EU's agricultural sector have declined by [over 20 %](#) since 1990. However, current mainstream farming practices are not yet sustainable. The proposal for the EU's post-2020 farm policy is under discussion, with three of its [nine objectives](#) devoted to environmental care, climate action, and landscapes and biodiversity protection. But the environmental dimension is only one of many societal demands that will contribute to shaping future EU agricultural policy. Other demands include guaranteeing food security to all Europeans, ensuring farm viability for EU farmers, and contributing to rural vitality. Additionally, the debates around food packaging and trading, unhealthy consumption habits, and food waste will contribute to shaping the future of sustainable food and farming policies in the EU.

European Commission proposal

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's political [guidelines](#) state that 'we will support our farmers with a new "Farm to Fork Strategy" on sustainable food along the whole value chain.' This statement showcases the new Commission's ambition towards a more holistic approach to food production in the spirit of the circular economy. As an important building block of the [European Green Deal](#), the ['Farm to Fork' strategy](#) is meant to complement existing rules on the food supply chain – currently spread over various EU policies and measures – and to build an integrated framework covering the whole chain. Health and Food Safety Commissioner Stella Kyriakides has the [lead](#) on the strategy, under the [coordination](#) of Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans. Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski will contribute

by 'looking at how the agri-food sector can improve the sustainability of food production across the food chain, including through organic production' (Agriculture Commissioner's [mission letter](#)). Environment, Ocean, and Fisheries Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius will also contribute by devising strategies to draw on the [potential](#) of aquaculture and sustainable seafood. The Commission intends to present the legislative and non-legislative details of the strategy in spring 2020 and launch a debate with stakeholders in all stages of the food chain. The Green Deal [roadmap](#) offers an indication of the key actions to be implemented:



- In 2020-2021, the Commission will examine the sustainability ambition of the EU Member States' draft national [strategic plans](#) stemming from the proposal for the EU's post-2020 farm policy;
- In 2021, the Commission will put forward measures, including legislative ones, to reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides and to curb the use of fertilisers and antibiotics.

Certain key elements of the strategy have already been clearly defined. At producer level, this approach involves supporting EU farmers and fishermen to provide Europeans with nutritious, affordable, and safe food in a sustainable manner – for example by developing innovative ways to protect harvests from pests and diseases, introducing innovative techniques in the food production system, and enhancing precision agriculture, organic farming, agro-ecology, agro-forestry, and animal welfare standards. Therefore, the strategy aims to support producers' efforts to tackle climate change, protect the environment, and preserve biodiversity, while ensuring a decent living for themselves. Moving forward in the value chain of food, the strategy aims to act on packaging, storage, transport, food waste, food fraud, and imported food. To complement this, the strategy also aims to improve the information available to consumers, helping them to choose healthy and sustainable diets and reduce food waste. In terms of the 2021-2027 EU budget, the Commission's strategy aims at contributing to the climate objectives through up to 40 % of agricultural expenditure and up to 30 % of the maritime and fisheries fund.

European Council and Council position

On 12 December 2019, EU leaders were presented the Commission communication on the European Green Deal. In the Council, national delegations expressed their willingness to support a higher environmental and climate ambition for the EU's [post-2020](#) farm policy, pointing out however that key issues still remained to be solved before an agreement could be reached – such as the envisaged cuts in 2021-2027 agricultural funding and the request from some delegations for flexibility in adapting environmental requirements to local needs. On 16 December 2019, EU agriculture ministers adopted conclusions on [animal welfare](#) and [food fraud](#) – topics included in the 'Farm to Fork' strategy.

Stakeholders' views

Following the announcement of the Green Deal and the 'Farm to Fork' strategy, Copa-Cogeca, the union of EU farmers and their cooperatives, affirmed its [willingness](#) to support what it considers an ambitious approach. However, the union questioned, among other issues, how the cuts planned in agricultural spending and the delays in the approval of the post-2020 farm policy would be reconciled with the increased ambitions of the strategy. The European Council of Young Farmers welcomed the [strategy](#) and called for adequate measures to assist farmers to become more sustainable. A coalition of [thirty NGOs](#) welcomed the 'Farm to Fork' strategy as a crucial opportunity to address societal concerns, but expressed their concern over the lack of concrete commitments. Ahead of their participation in the stakeholder debate, they put forward objectives, actions, and targets around key policy areas for establishing sustainable food systems and succeeding where the EU's farm policy has failed. The think-tank Farm Europe put forward [actions](#) for an agricultural policy reform that it believes serves as the basis of the strategy. The Institute for European Environmental Policy stressed the need for adequate funding, enforcement of existing legislation, and science-based quantified targets in assessing the [issues](#) included in the strategy – from habitat to pesticides.

European Parliament position

Following the unveiling of the Commission's plans for the European Green Deal at the [extraordinary plenary session](#) of 11 December 2019, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on 15 January 2020, in which it sets out its response to those plans. Parliament welcomes the Commission's proposal to present a 'Farm to Fork' strategy in spring 2020 and emphasises the role of EU agriculture and farmers in tackling the challenges of the transition towards more sustainable agriculture. It calls for an EU farm policy that fully reflects the ambition of the European Green Deal and that actively supports farmers to deliver environmental and climate benefits in an economically viable manner, with an adequate EU agricultural budget that reflects this increased environmental ambition. Moreover, Parliament stresses the need to strengthen farmers' position in the agri-food supply chain, calls for an enforceable EU-wide food-waste reduction target of 50 % by 2030, and calls on the Commission to integrate fisheries and aquaculture products in its strategy.

