

Igfa Briefing

A Farm to Fork Strategy

Communication from the European Commission

Introduction

The European Commission published its [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) (F2F) on 20 May 2020. This strategy aims to build a more sustainable food system in Europe and ensure it is fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. It details EU plans for the future on a huge range of food-related policies from feed additives to pesticide use to the future CAP. A summary of the strategy highlighting the most relevant details for Igfa members is outlined below. A new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 was published alongside the F2F strategy.

The need for action

The European Green Deal is the EU's cornerstone policy aimed at making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The F2F Strategy is one vital part of the EU Green Deal. It focuses on sustainable food systems and emphasises how these systems are linked to healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet.

The strategy outlines a number of reasons why action is needed to change EU food systems, highlighting that the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the 'importance of a robust and resilient food system that continues to function in all circumstances, capable of ensuring access to a sufficient supply of affordable food for citizens'. It says that a shift to a sustainable food system can bring numerous benefits and notes that 'ensuring a sustainable livelihood for primary producers... is essential for the success of the recovery and the transition'.

The aim is for European food to now become the global standard for sustainability. The document acknowledges that the transition to sustainable food systems has started in some areas but adds that there is still a need to 'reduce dependency on pesticides and antimicrobials, reduce the use of fertilisers, increase organic farming, improve animal welfare, and reverse biodiversity loss'.

In relation to climate change, it acknowledges that 'EU agriculture is the only major system in the world that reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (by 20% since 1994)', but points out that reductions have not always been consistent, and that there are big differences across member states. Agriculture and the other players in the food chain must therefore play their role in contributing to the objective to have a climate neutral Union by 2050. It describes achieving sustainable food systems as a 'huge economic opportunity' to 'make sustainability their trademark'.

Action is also needed to improve diets in the EU and the document notes that 'while about 20% of the food produced is wasted, obesity is also rising'. It adds that 'If European diets were in line with dietary recommendations, the environmental footprint of food systems would also be significantly reduced'.

The responsibilities of the EU as a global player are also highlighted and the need for 'policies that help raise standards globally, in order to avoid the externalisation and export of unsustainable practices'.

Building a food chain that works for consumers, producers, climate and the environment.

The strategy says that the EU's goals for the food system will be achieved through:

- ensuring that the food chain has a neutral or positive environmental impact

- making sure that everyone has access to sufficient, nutritious, sustainable food
- ensuring that the most sustainable food also becomes the most affordable.

The commission therefore plans to propose legislation on an overarching framework for sustainable food systems before the end of 2023. This legislation should ‘ensure policy coherence at EU and national level, mainstream sustainability in all food-related policies and strengthen the resilience of food systems’. It will aim to ensure a ‘fair transition’ by taking into account the different starting points and different improvement potential between member states.

The legislation may also include common definitions and general food sustainability principles that will guide broader legislative developments. ‘Combined with certification and labelling on the sustainability performance of food products ..., the framework will allow operators to benefit from sustainability practices’.

Ensuring sustainable food production

Under this heading the commission outlines a number of specific target policy areas, highlighting that ‘all actors of the food chain must play their part’.

- **Carbon farming** – the strategy says that farming practices that remove CO2 from the atmosphere should be rewarded either via the CAP or other public or private initiatives. This carbon sequestration is highlighted as an example of the potential for a new green business model and ‘a new EU carbon farming initiative’ is specifically mentioned. The strategy says this initiative ‘will provide a new source of income for farmers’. The Commission will also develop a ‘regulatory framework for certifying carbon removals based on robust carbon accounting to monitor and verify the authenticity of carbon removals’.
- The document describes the ‘**circular bio-based economy**’ as an ‘untapped’ resource and mentions specifically the benefits of environment measures such as developing the production of renewable energy, advanced bio-refineries and farm based solar panels.
- **Pesticides** – the commission plans to take action to reduce pesticide use with a specific aim to reduce the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030. It will also aim to reduce the risk of what it describes as the ‘more hazardous pesticides’ by 50% by 2030. It plans to revise the directive on the sustainable use of pesticides and enhance provisions on integrated pest management (IPM). It is believed that these measures alongside promoting greater use of safe alternatives will help the move to alternative products and help maintain farmers’ incomes. On the topic of pesticides, it also plans to facilitate the placing on the market of pesticides containing biological active substances, reinforce the environmental risk assessment of pesticides, reduce the length of the pesticide authorisation process and overcome data gaps in pesticide statistics to promote evidence-based policymaking.
- **Nutrients** – measures will be taken to reduce agricultural nutrient losses by at least 50%. This will reduce the use of fertilisers by at least 20% by 2030. To achieve this, the commission wants to ensure that current relevant legislation on this topic is fully implemented and enforced, develop integrated nutrient management action plans with member states and extend the application of precise fertilisation techniques and sustainable agricultural practices especially in intensive livestock areas.
- **Feed additives** – As nearly 70% of the GHG emissions from agriculture comes from the animal sector, the commission plans to facilitate the placing on the market of ‘sustainable and innovative feed additives’ as a tool to reduce emissions from animals. A proposal for a revision of the Feed Additives Regulation is expected at the end of 2021.
- **Feed materials** – an assessment of EU policy will be done to evaluate how to reduce EU ‘dependency on critical feeds materials (e.g. soya grown on deforested land)’ and encourage EU-grown plant proteins. This will also include looking at the potential of alternative feed materials such as insects and by-products from the bio-economy.
- The commission plans to review its **EU promotion programme** for agricultural products so it is focused more on sustainability. On the meat side, it wants to ensure that EU promotions support ‘the most sustainable, carbon-efficient methods of livestock production’.
- **Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** – the document mentions the health problems and costs for animals and humans of AMR and outlines that action will be taken to reduce overall EU sales of antimicrobials for farmed

animals by 50% by 2030. It adds that the new rules on veterinary medicines and medicated feed provide a range of measures to achieve this objective.

- **Animal welfare** – given that better animal welfare improves animal health and therefore reduces the need for medication, the commission plans to revise current animal welfare legislation including on animal transport and the slaughter of animals.
- **Plant health** – because climate change brings new threats to plant health, measures to better protect plants from emerging pests and diseases are needed. The document says that new innovative techniques may play a role in improving biodiversity and could ‘accelerate the process of reducing dependency on pesticides’. The commission is therefore carrying out a study which will look at the potential of new genomic techniques to improve sustainability along the food supply chain.
- **Organic production** – the commission believes that the market for organic produce needs to be promoted further and plans to publish an Action Plan on organic farming. The aim is to have at least 25% of the EU’s agricultural land under organic farming by 2030.
- **CAP** – improving climate performance is a vital aim of the new CAP 2022. Under the new CAP proposals, member states will be required to submit a CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) to the commission for approval. The CSP will detail how member states plan to achieve the nine new specific objectives for the future CAP. Four of these objectives are environment or climate-related and link directly to the aims of the EU Green Deal. The commission plans to make recommendations to each member state on what could be necessary under the new objectives of the CAP. However, the F2F strategy identifies a number of things specifically that should be included in the CSPs:
 - Farm houses and barns are often perfect locations for placing solar panels and such investments should be prioritised in the future CSPs.
 - Agricultural practices that reduce the use of pesticides through the CAP will be of paramount importance and the CSPs should reflect this transition and promote access to advice.
 - Member states will include in their CSPs measures to improve nutrient management such as the Farm Sustainability Tool for nutrient management.
 - The commission will strictly assess any proposal for coupled support in the CSPs from the perspective of the need for overall sustainability.
 - The new ‘eco-schemes’ will offer a major stream of funding to boost sustainable practices and will have to be appropriately resourced and implemented in the CSPs. The Commission will support the introduction of a minimum ring-fencing budget for eco-schemes.
 - To speed up innovation and accelerate knowledge transfer, the Commission will work with member states to strengthen the role of the European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) in the CSPs.
 - In their CSPs, member states will need to scale up support for Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and strengthen resources to develop and maintain appropriate advisory services needed to achieve the Green Deal objectives and targets.

Ensuring food security

While the current COVID-19 pandemic has no connection to food safety, it has shown that EU food security can be put at risk. The document says that ‘climate change and biodiversity loss constitute imminent and lasting threats to food security’ and that resilience needs to be built into the system by making it more sustainable. The commission plans to assess and enhance current systems to deal with crises and specifically mentions that the ‘agricultural crisis reserve will be revamped so its full potential can be used upfront in the case of crisis in agricultural markets’.

Stimulating sustainable food processing, wholesale, retail, hospitality and food services practices

The commission says that the ‘food industry and retail sector should show the way’ on sustainability ‘by increasing the availability and affordability of healthy, sustainable food options to reduce the overall environmental footprint of the food system’. The commission therefore plans to develop an ‘EU Code of Conduct for responsible business and

marketing practice accompanied with a monitoring framework'. It will ask food companies to make detailed commitments on improving diets, reducing the environmental footprint of products, energy efficiency, adapting marketing and advertising strategies and reducing packaging. Specifically, the document notes that marketing campaigns advertising meat at very low prices must be avoided.

Food packaging will also need to be more sustainable and the commission will look at ways to promote reusable and recyclable materials and ways to improve packaging so that food waste is reduced.

The commission will also look to enhance and create shorter supply chains. The aim here is to reduce dependence on long-haul transportation.

Promoting sustainable food consumption and facilitating the shift to healthy, sustainable diets

This section of the document deals with the need to change diets in the EU and reverse trends in obesity. It says that 'moving to a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat' would not only be better for health but also for the sustainability of the food system. To this end, the commission will look again at food labelling and will:

- propose harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling
- consider extending mandatory origin or provenance indications to certain products
- examine ways to harmonise voluntary green claims and to create a sustainable labelling framework
- explore ways to provide information to consumers through other means including digital.

To improve the availability and price of sustainable food and to promote healthy and sustainable diets in institutional catering, the commission will determine the best way of setting minimum mandatory criteria for sustainable food procurement. This will help public authorities' source sustainable food and boost sustainable farming systems, such as organic farming.

Reducing food loss and waste

The document notes that tackling food loss and waste is key to achieving sustainability and will deliver numerous positive impacts. The current aim is to halve per capita food waste at retail and consumer levels by 2030. The commission is therefore planning to propose legally binding targets to reduce food waste across the EU in 2023, after a new methodology for measuring food waste and new data from the member states is received.

The commission plans to integrate food loss and waste prevention into other EU policies and specifically plans to investigate and explore ways of preventing food losses at the production stage.

Enabling the transition

Research, innovation, technology and investments

The document says that 'research and innovation (R&I) are key drivers in accelerating the transition' to sustainable food systems. Under Horizon 2020, the EU's Research and Innovation programme, there will be a new call for proposals for research to address the priorities of the EU Green Deal. €1 billion will be made available. The plan for the future is to focus research resources and funding on a range of related topics, though increasing the availability and source of alternative proteins and meat substitutes is mentioned as a key area.

The commission aims to accelerate the rollout of fast broadband in rural areas to achieve the objective of 100% access by 2025. It says all farmers and rural areas need connections to be fast and reliable, adding that this is key to enable mainstreaming of precision farming and use of artificial intelligence.

Advisory services, data and knowledge-sharing, and skills

The document notes that advisory services are especially important for primary producers and tailoring the advice on sustainability will be important. The commission will therefore promote effective Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), involving all food chain actors.

A Farm *Sustainability* Data Network will collect data on the F2F targets and other sustainability indicators. Previously, this was the Farm *Accountancy* data Network but the change in focus of the tool will enable the benchmarking of farm performance against regional, national or sectoral averages. The commission is also planning best practice guidance for businesses on sustainability.

Promoting the global transition

The Commission plans to use its political weight and trade policy to promote a global transition to sustainable agri-food systems. It will aim to include 'an ambitious sustainability chapter in all EU bilateral trade agreements' and seek to ensure they are fully implemented and enforced. Key areas in this regard will be animal welfare, the use of pesticides and the fight against antimicrobial resistance.

International cooperation will also focus on food research and innovation but reducing the pressure on biodiversity worldwide will be key. Specifically, the Commission plans to present in 2021 a legislative proposal and other measures to avoid or minimise the placing of products associated with deforestation or forest degradation on the EU market.

The document says that imported food must continue to comply with relevant EU regulations and standards and specifically mentions pesticides saying that the EU will:

- take into account environmental aspects when assessing requests for import tolerances for pesticide substances no longer approved in the EU
- promote a gradual move towards the use of safer plant protection products and review import tolerances for substances meeting the 'cut-off criteria' and presenting a high risk for health.

It adds that to address the global threat of AMR, products of animal origin imported into the EU will have to comply with strict requirements on the use of antibiotics in line with EU rules.

Conclusion

The aim of this strategy is to make the EU food system a global standard for sustainability. The commission will review this strategy by mid-2023 to assess whether it needs adjustment.

Link to all the documents on the commission website https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en