

For Sustainable Food: Agriculture Policy in a Changing World

Executive Summary

In the context of the European Union's ambitious objectives to become the first climate-neutral continent, the agrifood sector stands at a critical juncture. The need to harmonise agricultural practices with environmental sustainability, technological advancement, and societal expectations for nutritious, affordable food has never been more pressing. This document outlines policy recommendations proposed by the PATHWAYS project, aimed at reorienting the EU's Common Agricultural Policy towards a sustainable food system that addresses climate change, supports farmers, and ensures food security.

1. Introduction

The European Union's agricultural policy is at a crossroads, facing challenges from environmental sustainability demands, technological evolution, and the pressing need to increase production sustainably. The recent formal adoption of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) aligns with the broader goals of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy. Yet, there remains a gap between policy, agricultural practices, and sustainability objectives.

2. Policy Context

- **The European Green Deal:** A roadmap for making the EU's economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas.
- **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):** Key legislation aiming to support farmers and ensure Europe's food security while incorporating flexibility for member states to meet local needs and sustainability goals.
- **Farm to Fork Strategy:** Seeks to transition to a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system, emphasising the need for sustainable agricultural practices.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Performance-Based Payments (PBP)

Recommendation: PATHWAYS advocates for implementing performance-based payments within the CAP, leveraging a set of clear, agreed-upon metrics to incentivise sustainable farming practices. This approach should focus on:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Enhancing biodiversity.
- Improving soil health.
- Ensuring water quality and efficiency.

3.2 Emissions Reduction Incentives

Recommendation: Introduce a mechanism within the agrifood sector that offers payment incentives for farmers actively reducing emissions and adhering to climate targets. This should involve:

- Support for transitioning to low-emission livestock farming.
- Encouragement of carbon sequestration practices.
- Adoption of renewable energy sources.



3.3 Shift Towards Sustainable Diets

Recommendation: Promote a reduction in EU-level animal protein production and a policy-driven shift towards diets lower in animal proteins. This involves:

- Ensuring the nutritional adequacy of diets.
- Supporting the production and consumption of plant-based proteins.
- Facilitating the market entry of sustainable, high-quality animal protein products.

4. Analysis

A shift towards a more sustainable agrifood system requires balancing production with environmental sustainability. Adopting technology in livestock farming, the cessation of human-edible feed trade for livestock and promoting plant-based diets present avenues for reducing emissions and improving animal welfare while ensuring the sector's economic viability and food security.

5. Conclusion

PATHWAYS' recommendations aim to align the EU's agriculture policy with the goals of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy, fostering a sustainable, resilient, and climate-friendly food system. By adopting these policy measures, the EU can support its farmers, protect the environment, and ensure the health and well-being of its citizens.

About PATHWAYS

PATHWAYS, coordinated by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and comprising 28 partners from 12 countries, is a Horizon 2020 project that aims to identify and enhance sustainable practices in the European livestock sector. With a budget of €9 million over five years (2021-2026), PATHWAYS contributes directly to the objectives of the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy, a core component of the EU Green Deal.