EU protein strategy

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European Parliament presents its vision for a new EU protein strategy

Draft European Parliament Report: European Protein Strategy

Update

The European Parliament's Agriculture Committee has set out its ideas for increasing protein production. It encourages the European Commission to put forward an ambitious new protein strategy. This is expected to be published in early 2024.

Background

There is a high demand for vegetable protein from the EU livestock sector. This demand cannot be met by EU production. So the EU is critically dependent on imports of plant-based proteins for animal feed, especially soybeans from Argentina, Brazil, and the USA.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased the risk of price volatility and trade disruptions. As a result of supply disruptions, feed costs have risen, contributing to high levels of food inflation in the EU. There are also concerns that EU demand for protein crops is a key driver of deforestation, land degradation, and biodiversity loss in non-EU countries.

In November 2018 the Commission published a report that made policy recommendations to strengthen the development of EU-grown plant proteins, but did not lay out a comprehensive protein strategy (European Commission 2018).

The 2020 Farm to Fork strategy made further commitments to fostering EU-grown plant proteins, including alternative feed materials, but did not put in place a protein plan.

In spring 2022, pressure from the European Parliament and EU Member States led the Commission to announce future work on a protein strategy (Euractiv 2022).

Impacted products

Protein crops, seaweed, insects

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What is changing?

In September 2023, the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee set out its ideas on what the EU should do to stimulate domestic production of proteins. The Parliament hopes to shape the European Commission's thinking on a new EU strategy, expected in early 2024.

Reducing EU dependency on imported proteins broadly requires:

- increasing EU production of plant-based proteins
- diversifying the available protein sources for food and feed (including microbial, insect, and seaweed proteins)
- greater efficiency and circularity in the way food is produced and consumed.

The Parliament proposes a number of concrete policy actions to stimulate EU plant-based protein production and enable European protein producers to become more competitive.

- A feed additives regulation that promotes innovation (as feed additives are important for reducing emissions and improving protein consumption).
- Simpler novel food legislation that will allow innovative products to come to the market more quickly.
- Allowing more types of biodegradable waste to be used as feed.
- Legislation on biofuels that allows for long-term stable production (to give producers of protein-rich crops greater confidence of gaining income from biowaste).
- Adoption of a regulation on new genomic techniques.
- New carbon removal certification to stimulate the production of protein-rich crops with a carbon-reducing effect.
- Common Agricultural Policy rules that provide the stability and flexibility needed to incentivise the production of protein-rich crops.
- Front-of-pack labelling that compares the carbon footprint of food and feed.
- Development of an EU food protein balance sheet.
- Rules on purchases by public bodies ("public procurement") that will provide incentives for more sustainable protein production and consumption.
- Funding of research and development into plant-based and alternative proteins.

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Why?

The European Parliament highlights that the EU produces only 77% of the feed protein used within the Union. And only 29% of the high-protein feedstock needed to balance animal feed originates from the EU. The Parliament believes that the EU is too dependent on imports of proteins. So there is an urgent need to increase EU protein production through concrete policy actions.

Timeline

The European Parliament is due to vote on the Agriculture Committee's draft report in mid-October 2023.

The European Commission is expected to publish a review of its protein policy in early 2024.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

Challenges

- Increased EU self-sufficiency in high-protein crops potentially reduces demand for imports.

Opportunities

- Diversified protein sources for food and feed can incentivise alternative protein supply chains – for instance, insects and seaweed – and open up new markets for non-EU countries with a competitive advantage in producing these proteins.
- Growing EU consumer demand for green proteins can boost opportunities for sustainable actors, including for social and economic empowerment of producers in sustainable supply chains and food systems.
- Reduced imports of plant-based protein will reinforce existing initiatives to reduce deforestation in non-EU countries.

Recommended Actions

Countries exporting plant-based proteins to the EU should consider:

- potential impacts of increased EU protein self-sufficiency on their exports of plant-based proteins for animal feed

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- opportunities and potential competitive advantage of investing in alternative sustainable supply chains tapping into the growing EU market for green proteins.

Resources

European Commission (2018) Report on the development of plant proteins in the European Union.

Euractiv (2022) EU-wide protein strategy on the cards as Commission changes its tune. Euractiv, 5 April.

Sources

European Parliament (2023) Draft Report: European Protein Strategy. Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

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