# Farm to Fork Strategy

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European Commission 2021 - 2024 strategy on sustainability in the food chain

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system

## Update

On 20 May 2020 the European Commission published a Communication on its Farm to Fork Strategy, “a new, sustainable and inclusive growth strategy to boost the economy, improve people's health and quality of life, care for nature, and leave no one behind”. It sets out the major challenges and actions required to transition towards a more sustainable food supply. It also listed the major initiatives the Commission intends to take in the period 2021–2024.

## What is changing?

### PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

The European Commission’s strategy identified the following priorities and actions in the transition to a sustainable food system.

The proposed actions listed here are those of potential relevance to AGRINFO stakeholders, with an indication of the timescale set out in the strategy.

### Ensuring sustainable food production

All EU actors in the supply chain need to improve the sustainability of processes, in part by adopting new technologies. Priorities include decreasing chemical pesticides and fertilisers, reducing the use of antimicrobials in farmed animals, and improving animal welfare. Organic farming and the transition towards more sustainable fishing should be promoted.

Proposed actions:

- propose a legislative framework for sustainable food systems (2023)
- revise the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive to reduce risk/dependency on pesticides (Q1 2022)


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- facilitate placing plant protection products containing biological active substances on the market (Q4 2021)
- revise existing animal welfare legislation (Q4 2023)
- revise the Regulation on feed additives to reduce the environmental impact of livestock farming (Q4 2021)
- develop EU carbon farming initiative creating incentives for farmers to sequester carbon (Q3 2021).

## Ensuring food security

A sustainable food system must be able to provide food for all, at all times. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the vulnerability of the system for both consumers and agri-food workers. The Commission will develop contingency plans for ensuring food security in times of crisis.

Proposed action:

- develop a contingency plan to ensure food supply and food security (Q4 2021).

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

The EU food industry needs to play its part in ensuring affordable, sustainable food options. Initiatives on good marketing practices and corporate governance will encourage and oblige a greater focus on sustainability.

Proposed actions:

- improve the corporate governance framework to integrate sustainability into corporate strategies (Q1 2021)
- stimulate reformulation of processed food, including setting maximum levels for certain nutrients (Q4 2021)
- set nutrient profiles to restrict promotion of food high in salt, sugars and/or fat (Q4 2022)
- revise food contact materials legislation to improve food safety and reduce the environmental footprint (Q4 2022)
- revise EU marketing standards for agricultural, fishery and aquaculture products to reflect sustainability goals (2021–2022)
- reinforce system for tackling food fraud (2021–2022).


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

Current consumption patterns contribute to health problems and damage the environment. Improved consumer information, tax incentives, and setting sustainability criteria for food in public institutions (e.g. schools and hospitals) will support the shift to healthy sustainable diets.

Proposed actions:

- harmonise mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling to facilitate health-conscious food choices (Q4 2022)
- introduce mandatory origin indication for certain products (Q4 2022)
- set minimum mandatory criteria for sustainable food procurement in schools and public institutions (2021)
- introduce sustainable food labelling framework to empower consumers to make sustainable food choices (2024)
- review the EU school scheme's legal framework to refocus the scheme on sustainable food (2023).

## Reducing food loss and waste

There are compelling economic as well as environmental arguments for reducing food waste. Setting binding targets for reducing food waste, and improving consumer understanding of "use by" and "best before" dates on food, will mitigate this problem.

Proposed actions:

- set EU-level targets for food waste reduction (2023)
- revise EU rules on date marking (use by and best before dates) (Q4 2022).

## Combating food fraud along the food supply chain

Food fraud – misleading the consumer – undermines efforts to advance sustainability. The Commission proposes to scale up action to control and prevent food fraud.

Proposed action:

- reinforce system for tackling food fraud (2021–2022)


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## TARGETS

As part of its sustainability vision, the European Commission sets out targets for some of its identified priorities. By 2030 the Commission aims to achieve within the EU (compared to the 3-year average 2015–2017):

- 50% decrease in use of pesticides
- 50% decrease in use of more hazardous pesticides
- at least 20% reduction in use of fertilisers
- 50% reduction in sales of antimicrobials in farmed animals/aquaculture
- 25% of all agricultural land farmed organically.

## Timeline

Some of the initiatives set out in the strategy were not completed. See

Overview: EU Farm to Fork and Green Deal Initiatives.

## What are the major implications for exporting countries?

A number of organisations have carried out assessments of the production and trade implications of the Farm to Fork Strategy and Green Deal (Bremmer et al 2021; Henning & Witzke 2021; IDDRI 2021; JRC 2021; Beckman et al. 2020). Because these studies focus on the numerical targets around pesticides, fertilisers, organic farming, antimicrobials and biodiversity (set out in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030), they do not capture the full scope of the strategy, and the results must be treated with caution (European Commission 2021).

For example, a transition from meat-based to plant-based diets could have an impact on demand that is not captured in these assessments.

Studies suggest that the transition foreseen by the Commission will have a significant impact on levels of production in the EU, most notably due to increases in organic production, leading to a shortfall that will have to be met through third country imports. A significant increase in demand is identified for oilseeds, cereals, fruit and vegetables, beef, poultry and milk (JRC 2021). But whatever the cost of the transition, it will be lower than the cost of inaction (European Commission 2022).

Such sizeable shifts in production open up opportunities for agricultural exporters, including those in AGRINFO partner countries. However, others warn that lower production in the EU, and the resulting increase in demand on third country production, could escalate world market prices, with potentially negative effects on lower-income countries that depend on food imports, and on


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low-income households in both food-importing and food-exporting countries (Dekeyser & Woolfrey 2021).

The Commission received criticism from the European Parliament for not having undertaken a comprehensive impact assessment in conjunction with the strategy. In its Resolution on the strategy, the European Parliament (2020) stressed the need for the first mid-term review of the Farm to Fork strategy in mid-2023 "to reflect in depth on the cumulative impact of all actions in a holistic and systemic manner, covering all dimensions of sustainability, be they environmental, economic or social, including health".

## Resources

Beckman, J. et al. (2020) Economic and food security impacts of agricultural input reduction under the European Union Green Deal's Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies. Economic Research Service, USDA.

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Dekeyser, K. & Woolfrey, S. (2021) A greener Europe at the expense of Africa? Why the EU must address the external implications of the Farm to Fork Strategy. Briefing Note 1372, European Centre for Development Policy.

European Commission (2022) The Farm to Fork Strategy: For a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system [presentation].

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IDDRI (2021) An agroecological Europe by 2050: What impact on land use, trade and global food security? Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations.

JRC (2021) Modelling environmental and climatic ambition in the agricultural sector with the CAPRI model. Joint Research Centre, European Commission.


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## Sources

Communication: A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system

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