# CAP at the Crossroads

## Reforming EU CAP subsidies to support healthy sustainable diets

FOODRISE

# Contents



*Front cover image: Healthy plant-based foods. Credit: Shutterstock*

# Executive Summary

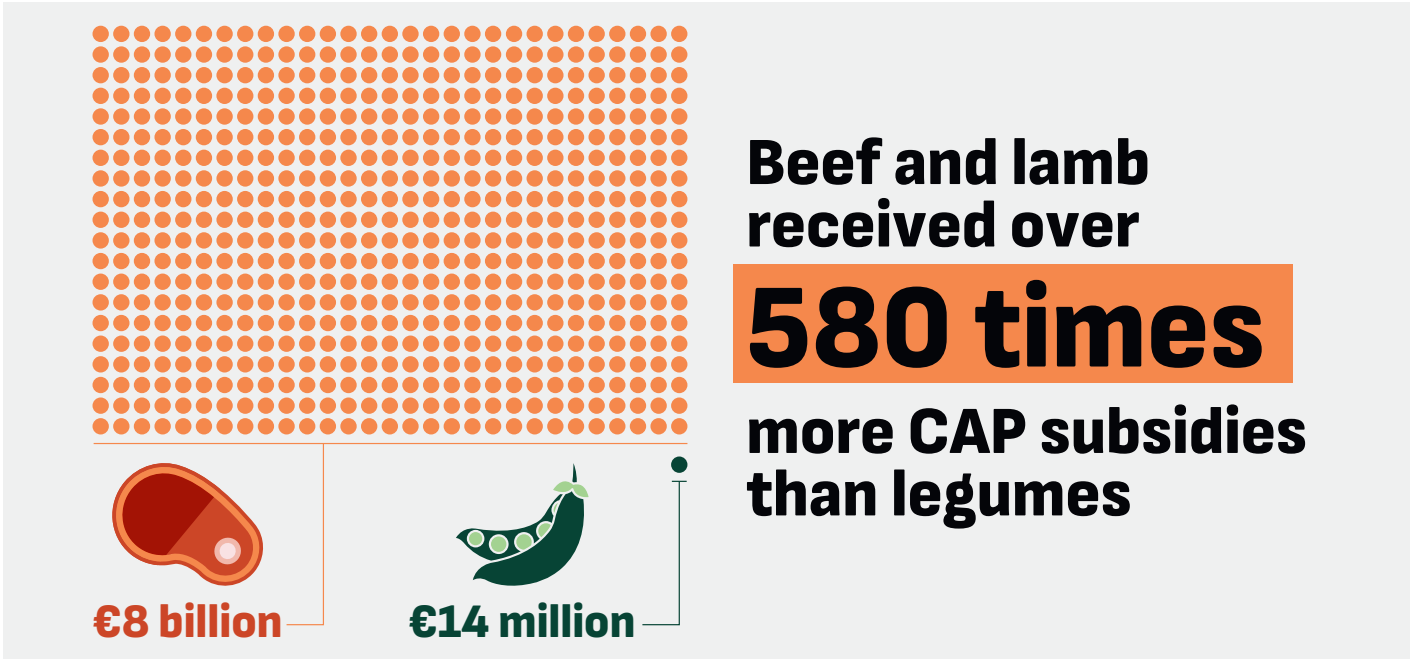
The EU is at a crossroads – poised to make crucial decisions on the 2028–2034 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), one of the biggest allocations of the EU budget worth billions of euros. This provides a unique opportunity for the EU to support a transition to healthy sustainable diets – a huge economic opportunity with multiple benefits for EU food security, climate mitigation, nature and health. The alternative is to continue to waste billions of euros in subsidies propping up a broken status quo.

This report presents data showing that huge volumes of EU taxpayers' money are being used to subsidise unsustainable livestock production and promote meat and dairy products to EU citizens. This distorts competition and creates an unfair advantage for a model of food production which harms European health and the environment. Staggeringly, the estimated €39 billion in Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies spent on animal-sourced foods in 2020 makes up nearly a quarter (23%) of the EU's total budget of €168.7 billion for 2020.[1] Overall, animal-sourced foods received an estimated three-quarters (77%) of EU CAP subsidies in 2020 – over 3 times more than plant-based foods.[2]

**This report presents in detail, for the first time, the value of CAP subsidy payments distributed to individual food types in 2020.[a] Based on our analysis, we estimate that in 2020:**

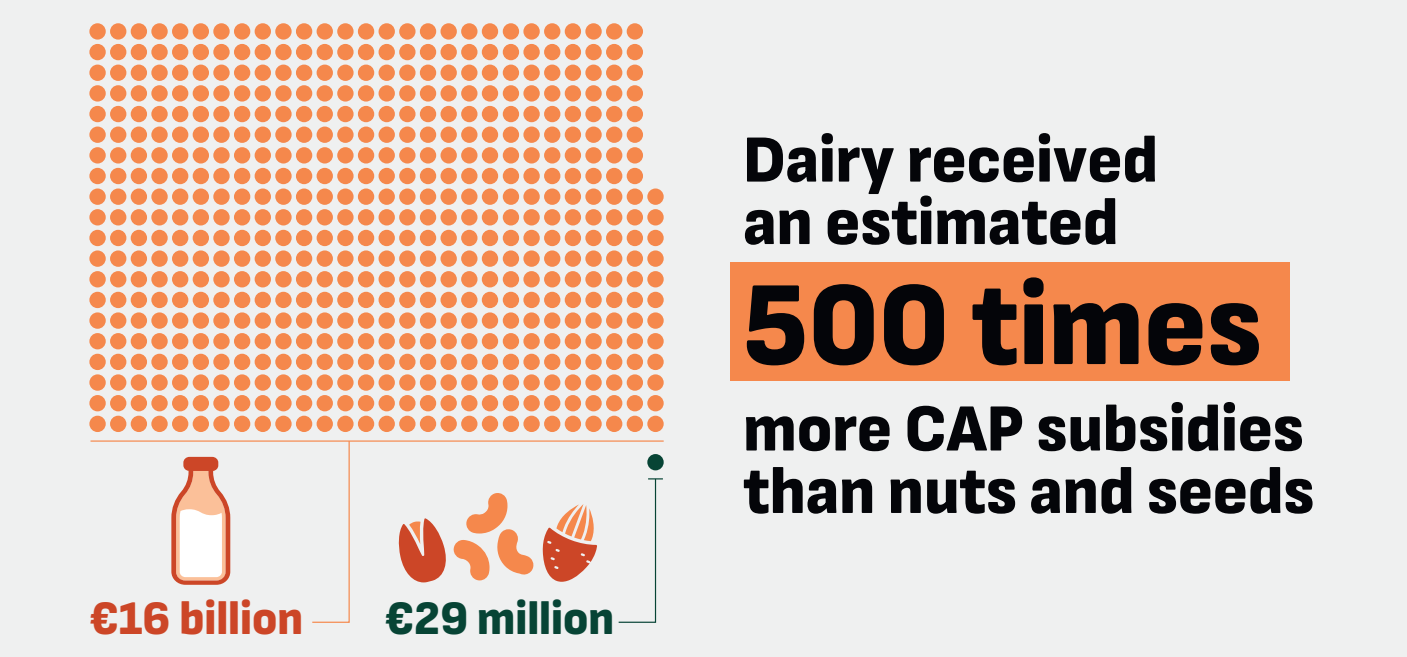
- **Meat and dairy received over 10 times more CAP subsidies than fruit and vegetable production, and more than 16 times more than cereal production.**
- **Beef and lamb received over 580 times more CAP subsidies than legumes – and pork received nearly 240 times more.**
- **Dairy received 554 times more CAP subsidies than nuts and seeds.**

**Figure 1:** Volume of EU CAP subsidies going to beef and lamb vs. legumes in 2020 (euros), on a consumption basis




a Foodrise analysis was based on the underlying dataset from Kortleve et al (2025), generously provided by researchers at the University of Leiden. Figures are calculated on a consumption basis – so subsidies for crops fed to animals are counted towards animal sourced-foods. For instance, estimates for subsidies to beef and lamb includes estimated subsidies to animal feed used to produce beef and lamb.

**Figure 2:** Volume of EU CAP subsidies going to dairy vs. nuts and seeds in 2020 (euros), on a consumption basis




This system is fuelling climate change and damaging our health: animal-sourced foods are estimated to cause between 81-86% of the embodied greenhouse gas emissions from EU food production,[3] whilst only supplying an estimated 32% of calories and 64% of protein consumed in the EU.[4] Diet-related disease linked to animal-sourced food consumption in the EU cost an estimated €452 billion in 2022.[5]

The meat and dairy industry – increasingly dominated by large corporations such as JBS, Nestlé, FrieslandCampina and Danish Crown – pushes the narrative that any attempt to challenge its dominance amounts to policymakers "telling people what to eat". But the truth is that EU policymakers already shape how Europeans eat, particularly through subsidies. Powerful agribusiness groups have spent millions of euros lobbying the EU to keep these massive subsidies for industrial-scale livestock production,[6] and block the transition towards healthy sustainable diets.[7]

But there is hope. The 2024 Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture resulted in a breakthrough agreement between farming groups, civil society, businesses and academics, when participating groups unanimously adopted its final report.[8] The agreed text clearly stated that a "shift towards balanced diets that are healthier and more sustainable is essential".[9] It noted "a trend in the EU towards a reduction of consumption of certain animal-based products and an increased interest in plant-based proteins" and recommended "it is crucial to support this trend by re-balancing towards plant-based options and helping consumers to embrace the transition". [10]

Indeed, many European retailers and catering businesses are beginning to shift to more plant-based foods to meet their sustainability commitments, and in response to changing consumer eating habits.[11] Europe is already a rapidly emerging leader in plant-based innovation – the European Plant-Based Food and Beverage Market is projected to grow by over 50% by 2030.[12] With support this could be accelerated – alternative proteins have potential to add an estimated €111 billion per year to the EU economy and support 414,000 high-quality jobs

by 2040.[13] This growth in plant-based foods presents an enormous economic opportunity for European producers. Europe has the potential to reduce reliance on imports, and lead the world in plant-based growth and innovation.

The case has never been stronger for accelerating the transition towards more plant-rich diets. In 2025, the EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Food Systems provided the most comprehensive global scientific evaluation of food systems to date, created by scientists in over 35 countries over six continents.[14] It identifies food systems as the largest contributor to exceeding five planetary boundaries – including land system change, biosphere integrity, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows, and climate change – and that even if a global energy transition away from fossil fuels occurs, food systems will put the world in breach of the Paris Climate agreement, which aims to limit global mean surface temperature rise to 1.5°C.[15]

The EAT-Lancet Commission puts forward the most up-to-date template for sustainable healthy diets: the updated Planetary Health Diet, which is a plant-rich diet with moderate amounts of animal-sourced foods and limited added sugars, saturated fats, and salt, which supports optimal health outcomes within planetary boundaries, and can be adapted to different contexts and cultures.[16] It highlights that food system transformation including adoption of the Planetary Health Diet could result in more than $5 trillion in savings globally per year.[17]

To achieve this, a key EAT-Lancet Commission recommendation is to repurpose existing agricultural subsidies – many of which currently do not have public benefit and are skewed towards meat and dairy production[18] - to promote dietary change and public goods such as health and environmental benefits.[19] Calls are growing for agricultural subsidies to be reformed to support a shift to more sustainable healthy diets and reduced livestock numbers – including from the World Bank,[20] the EU's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors,[21] and the European Court of Auditors.[22]

*Shopping for fruit and veg. Credit: Shutterstock*

Aligning closer with the Planetary Health Diet would have enormous benefits for the EU's farmers and citizens:

- **Farm incomes:** If Europeans shifted to high adherence to the Planetary Health Diet, agricultural incomes in the EU would increase by an estimated 5.4% on average by 2030 and 36.2% by 2050.[23]

- **Food security:** A 2022 study projected that adoption of the Planetary Health Diet in the EU and UK would enable more land previously used to grow animal feed to be used to grow food for direct human consumption, almost compensating for all production deficits as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[24]

- **Emissions:** The adoption of the Planetary Health Diet in 54 high-income countries could reduce agricultural production emissions by an estimated 61%, and could in addition sequester the equivalent of an estimated 14 years of current global agricultural emissions through nature restoration on spared land.[25]

- **Health:** It is estimated that up to 19–63% of deaths and up to 10–39% of cancers in Europe could be prevented by adoption of the Planetary Health Diet.[26 b]

- **Fertiliser and soils:** Aligning EU diets with the Planetary Health Diet has potential to reduce EU fertiliser use by nearly one-quarter (23.4%).[27] Halving European meat and dairy consumption could lead to an estimated 40% lower nitrogen emissions.[28]

- **Air pollution:** Reductions in European meat and dairy consumption would lead to lower levels of air pollution associated with an estimated 9-21% decrease in premature mortality in Europe – saving an estimated 20,000-44,000 lives per year.[29]

The EU, driven particularly by the rise of the far-right and agribusiness lobbying, is currently moving in the wrong direction – weakening existing environmental measures contained in the CAP, backtracking on the breakthrough Strategic Dialogue, and dismantling sustainability legislation in the name of "simplification". But the need for ambition has never been more important – EU policymakers must urgently change course, and embrace the many opportunities of a transition to healthy sustainable diets.

The Strategic Dialogue provides a good template for action, which has already been agreed by a broad range of EU stakeholders, and should be foundational to EU CAP reform. It recommends an EU Action Plan for Plant-based Foods covering the whole supply chain from farmers to consumers,[30] and an Agri-food Just Transition Fund which can support livestock farmers to embrace the transition, through financial support and training.[31]

b In a 20-year risk period.

*Gathering over food. Credit: Shutterstock*

We thus recommend that EU policymakers:

- Introduce a Plant-Based Action Plan to promote plant-based foods across the supply chain, from the producer to consumer.
- End the use of EU funds for the promotion and marketing of meat and dairy immediately.
- Introduce an Agri-food Just Transition Fund to support livestock farmers through a just transition to lower livestock numbers, more nature restoration, and more plant-based food production, rooted in agroecological food systems and food sovereignty.
- Rebalance CAP payments to primarily support diversification into more plant-based food production for direct human consumption.
- Provide support for rewetting of peatlands, rewilding of grasslands and restoration of a mosaic of biodiverse woodlands, on appropriate land – to be identified through a joined-up land use strategy.

# Glossary

**AJTF** – Agri-food Just Transition Fund

**Billion** – A billion is used to denote one thousand million

**CAP** – Common Agricultural Policy

**CIS** – Coupled Income Support

**$CO_2$** – Carbon dioxide

**$CO_2$eq** – Carbon dioxide equivalent

**DKK** – Danish krone

**Embodied greenhouse gas emissions** – The greenhouse gas emissions generated throughout the whole lifecycle of a product – in the case of food: from the farm, via processing and transport, to the consumer's plate.

**EU** – European Union

**Planetary Health Diet** – The EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Food Systems' template for a healthy sustainable diet, the Planetary Health Diet is a plant-rich diet with moderate amounts of animal-sourced foods and limited added sugars, saturated fats, and salt, which supports optimal health outcomes within planetary boundaries, and can be adapted to different contexts and cultures.

**$PM_{2.5}$** – Fine particulate matter

**SME** – Small and Medium-sized Enterprise


*Plant-based milks. Credit: Strahlengang, Shutterstock*

# Introduction

This report reveals that the EU pumps billions of euros into subsidised production and promotion of meat and dairy – shaping what Europeans eat, and mostly in ways that serve the meat and dairy industry. Whether they like it or not, huge volumes of EU taxpayers' money are handed over to promote meat and dairy products back to EU citizens, and help prop up the unsustainable mass-production of animal products. This report argues that this is a destructive and irresponsible way to spend public funds – perpetuating a system which fails farmers, drives climate crisis, damages citizens' health, keeps the EU reliant on food imports, and pollutes our air and rivers.

CAP subsidies would instead be better spent supporting a just transition to healthy sustainable diets – which have potential to increase farmer incomes, reduce EU reliance on imports, mitigate climate change, improve Europeans' health, and restore nature. At the very least, there is an urgent need to rebalance CAP subsidies by directing a fairer proportion to farmers producing plant-based foods, so that they can compete on an equal footing – particularly producers of agroecologically produced wholegrains, legumes, nuts, fruits and vegetables.

The 2024 Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture – which brought together farming groups, civil society, businesses and academics – concluded in a landmark report, which was unanimously adopted.[32] The agreed text is categorical that a "shift towards balanced diets that are healthier and more sustainable is essential".[33]

The Strategic Dialogue's breakthrough agreement comes amid an increasing global consensus on the need to transition to more healthy sustainable plant-rich diets. In 2025, the EAT-Lancet Commission on Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Food Systems provided the most comprehensive global scientific evaluation of food systems to date, created by scientists in over 35 countries over six continents.[34] They diagnosed that food systems are the largest contributor to exceeding five planetary boundaries – including land system change, biosphere integrity, freshwater change, biogeochemical flows, and climate change – and that even if a global energy transition away from fossil fuels occurs, food systems will cause the world to breach the Paris Climate agreement of limiting global mean surface temperature to 1.5°C. [35]

As a solution, they put forward an authoritative template for sustainable healthy diets: the updated Planetary Health Diet, which is a plant-rich diet with moderate amounts of animal-source foods and limited added sugars, saturated fats, and salt, which supports optimal health outcomes within planetary boundaries, and can be adapted to different contexts and cultures.[36] They found that a shift to the Planetary Health Diet globally could prevent up to 15 million premature deaths per year, and as part of a broader food system transformation could help reduce global food system emissions by more than half.[37]

This aligns with the findings of a survey of over two hundred climate scientists and food and agriculture experts, over half of whom have authored IPCC reports – which found that global livestock emissions need to peak by 2025 and be reduced by 61% by 2036, with faster and deeper reductions in higher-income countries, in order to limit global warming in line with the Paris agreement[38]. 85% of the experts surveyed said that dietary shifts to less animal-sourced foods were required, particularly in high and middle-income countries, ranking this as one of the most effective ways of reducing livestock emissions.[39] High-income regions like Europe have particular responsibility due to their affluence, high historical responsibility

for climate change, and high meat consumption – average meat consumption in Europe in 2022 was nearly double the global average.[40]

It has never been more urgent to transition to healthy sustainable plant-rich diets. Yet Big Meat and Dairy corporations have a vested interest in preserving the broken status quo. Like the fossil fuel industry, the meat and dairy industry has fought hard to lobby the EU against the change we need to build a healthier more sustainable future. As part of agribusiness lobby groups, it pours millions of euros into lobbying the EU to keep the subsidies pumping for production and promotion of meat, and prevent regulation of their health and environmental impacts (see Box 1 below). Hypocritically, these companies then push the narrative that any attempt to challenge the dominance of meat and dairy amounts to "politicians telling people what to eat". But the truth is that EU politicians already shape how Europeans eat, through subsidies and other policies – policies which currently perpetuate animal agriculture's dominant market position.

There are growing calls for subsidy reform to support a transition to more healthy sustainable plant-rich diets: including from the EAT-Lancet Commission[41] the EU's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors[42], and the World Bank.[43] The European Court of Auditors has highlighted that CAP subsidies should support reducing livestock emissions, and that reducing livestock numbers is the most effective means of doing so, but CAP subsidies currently actively disincentivise this.[44] This report aims to make a constructive contribution to this debate – providing further evidence for the overwhelming need for EU CAP subsidy reform to support healthy sustainable diets.

## Box 1: Meat and dairy industry lobbying

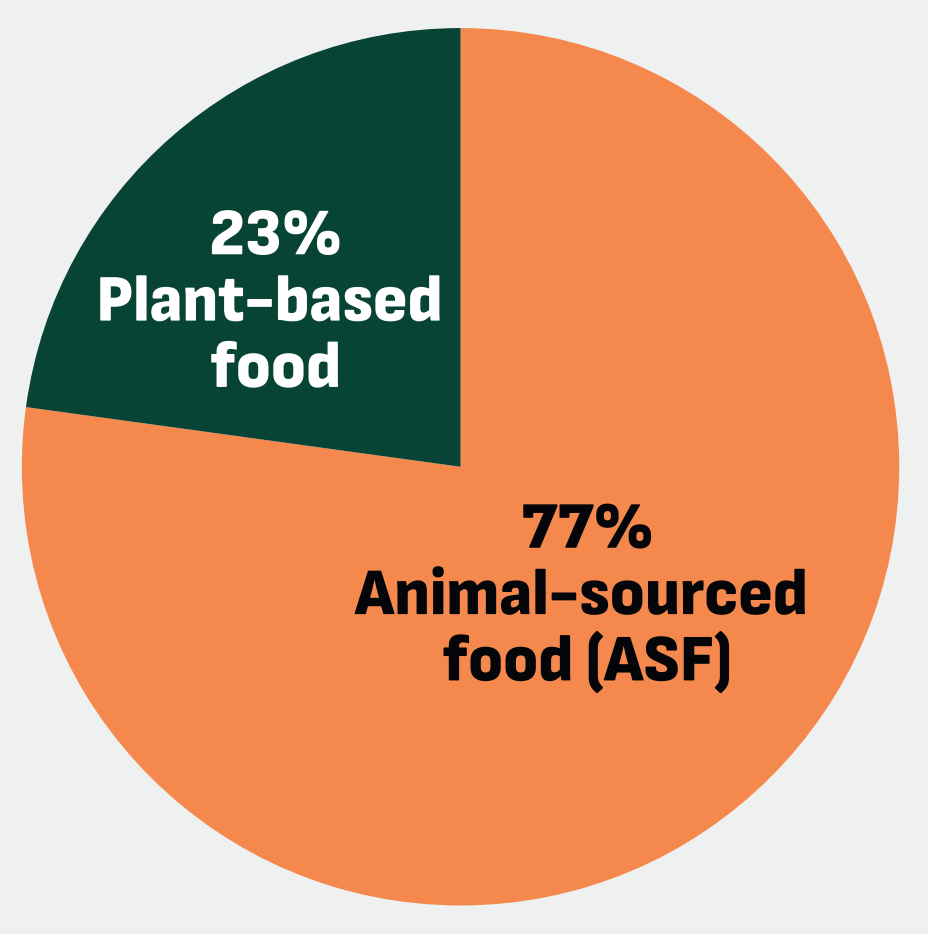
The meat and dairy industry has spent millions of euros lobbying the EU[45] to maintain the CAP's massive subsidies for industrial-scale livestock production, and oppose any environmental policies that might transition Europe to healthy sustainable diets – often through agribusiness trade groups.[46] Meat and dairy industries spent an estimated USD 18 million (€15 million) lobbying in the EU between 2014-20.[47] Lobbying by agribusiness groups such as Copa Cogeca has led to widespread weakening of ambition on shifts to healthy sustainable diets.[48] For instance, proposed reforms to the CAP promotion programme for agricultural products originally contained reference to "alignment with the objectives of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, in particular, encouraging the shift to a more plant-based diet, with less red and processed meat", but after extensive industry lobbying, this language was removed from subsequent versions of the plan.[49] Specific emissions reductions targets for agriculture were also removed from the EU's 2040 climate target proposal, and policies on agricultural methane, pesticides, and other regulations were weakened or scrapped following industry lobbying.[50]

# The meat and dairy industry currently maintains a stranglehold on CAP subsidies

The CAP is the single largest part of the EU budget – but it is broken, serving neither farmers nor sustainability. Just as EU countries continue to pour billions of euros of public money into fossil fuel subsidies,[51] it is a scandal, and deeply unfair, that the EU is wasting such a huge amount of EU taxpayers' money to fund the unsustainable overproduction of meat and dairy, whilst underfunding healthy plant-based foods like legumes, wholegrains, fruits and vegetables.

Shockingly, the estimated €39 billion in CAP subsidies spent on animal-sourced foods in 2020 makes up nearly a quarter (23%) of the EU's total budget of €168.7 billion for 2020.[52] In 2020, an estimated 77% (€39 billion) of the €50.6 billion of EU CAP subsidies were directed to animal-sourced foods – over 3 times more than plant-based foods, which received just 23% of CAP subsidies (€11.6 billion).[53] These shares are calculated on a consumption basis – so subsidies for crops fed to animals are counted towards animal sourced-foods.[c]

**Figure 3:** Proportion of EU CAP subsidies going to animal sourced-foods vs. plant-based foods in 2020 (on a consumption basis)




c This is a slight decrease compared to 2013 – when an estimated 82% (€47 billion) of the €57 billion CAP budget for food production was directed to animal-sourced foods. Source: Kortleve et al., 'Over 80% of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy Supports Emissions-Intensive Animal Products'.

**Foodrise presents in this report, for the first time, breakdowns of how CAP subsidy payments in 2020 were distributed to individual food types.[d] Based on this analysis, we estimate that in 2020:**

- Meat and dairy received over 10 times more CAP subsidies than fruit and vegetable production, and around 16 times more than cereal production (€39 billion compared to just €3.6 billion and €2.4 billion respectively).
- Beef and lamb received over 580 times more CAP subsidies than legumes (€8.0 billion compared to just €14 million) – and pork received nearly 240 times more (€4.6 billion).
- Dairy received 554 times more CAP subsidies than nuts and seeds (€16 billion compared to just €14 million).
- Lard and tallow received more than 2 times more CAP subsidies than vegetable oils (€3.7 billion compared to just €1.6 billion).
- Lard and tallow alone received more CAP subsidies than all fruit and vegetables combined.
- Pork received 160 times more CAP subsidies than nuts and seeds.

## Box 2: The benefits of legumes

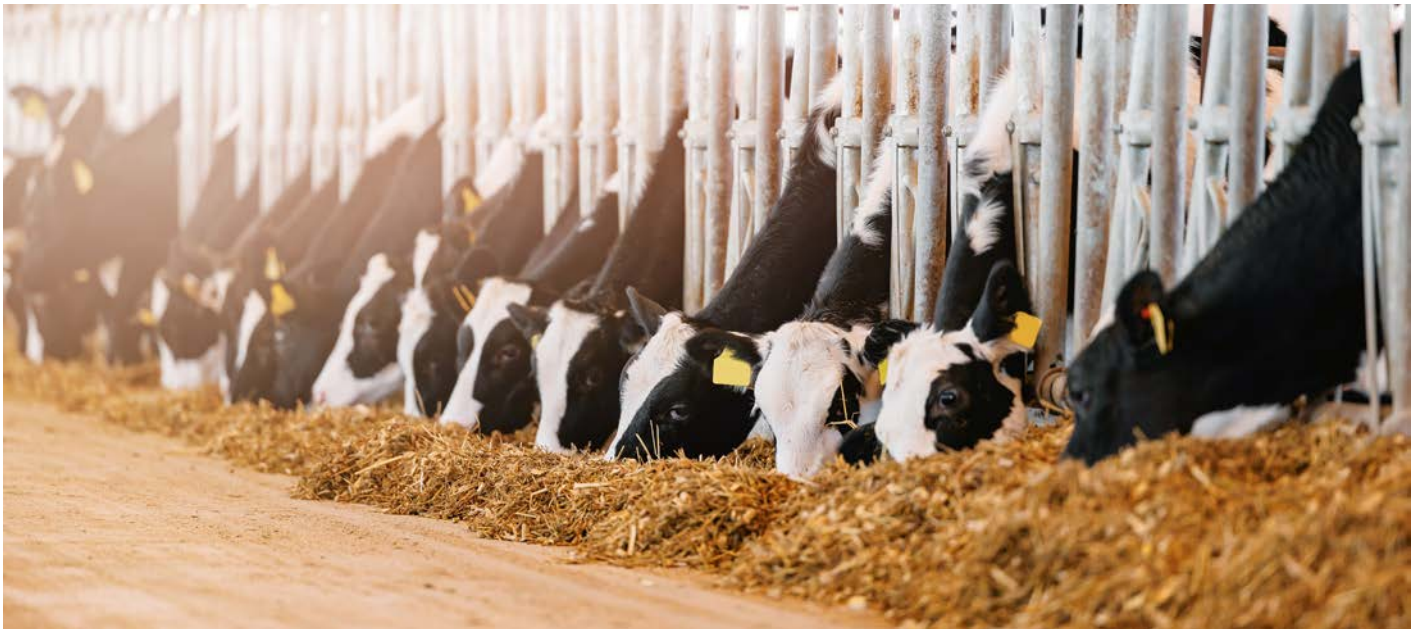
Growing and consuming more legumes such as lentils and beans would benefit European health, soils and climate. Many European dietary guidelines recommend higher consumption of legumes[54] – such as Spain which recommends eating at least 4 servings a week and ideally daily consumption,[55] and Greece which recommends at least 3 servings a week.[56] Legumes are also good for soil health: they fix nitrogen in soils – reducing reliance on synthetic fertilisers – sequester carbon, and facilitate the circulation of soil nutrients and water retention.[57] Replacing meat with legumes can result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions: on average, beef (from beef rather than dairy herds) causes 62 times more emissions compared with pulses, per 100g protein[58]. Research suggests that even beef from dairy herds using some of the lowest emissions production methods causes over 11 times more emissions than pulses per 100g protein.[59e] Pork has on average over 9 times higher emissions than pulses per 100g protein.[60]

## Box 3: The benefits of nuts and seeds

Nuts are rich in fibre, vitamins and minerals and macronutrients and active metabolites, and consumption of nuts is associated with reduced risks of cardiovascular diseases, cancer deaths and all-cause mortality.[61] Beef (from beef herds) causes on average 167 times more greenhouse gas emissions compared with nuts, and pork causes on average 15 times more emissions.[62] This is partly because planting tree nuts helps sequester carbon.[63] On average, almond milk causes an estimated 78% lower emissions compared to dairy milk, around 94% less land, 41% less water use, and 86% less eutrophication.[64]

d Foodrise analysis was based on the underlying dataset from Kortleve et al (2025), generously provided by researchers at the University of Leiden. Figures are again calculated on a consumption basis – so subsidies for crops fed to animals are counted towards animal sourced-foods. For instance, estimates for subsidies to beef and lamb includes estimated subsidies to animal feed used to produce beef and lamb.

e Beef from dairy herds tends to register as having lower emissions than beef from beef herds per kg protein, primarily because more protein is produced per cow (both dairy and beef, rather than just beef). The figures here for "lowest-emitting beef from dairy herds", refers to tenth percentile dairy beef impacts – that is, the emissions from producers whose lower-emissions production methods mean they cause lower emissions than 90% of other producers of beef from dairy cattle. The *average* emissions for beef from dairy herds is higher – over 21 times higher than for pulses per 100g protein. Approximately two thirds of EU cows are dairy herds European Parliament, *European Union Beef Sector* (European Parliament, 2022), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733676/EPRS_BRI(2022)733676_EN.pdf.



*Cattle eating hay. Credit: Parilov, Shutterstock*

Subsidies are just the tip of the iceberg: EU taxpayers also pay the cost for the livestock industry's externalised harms. For instance, diet-related disease linked to animal-sourced food consumption in the EU cost an estimated €452 billion in 2022.[65] This is a huge drain on the EU's healthcare systems – leading to avoidable deaths and illness, whilst diverting vital resources from vital frontline services. Livestock also causes costs through air and water pollution, and loss and damage due to climate change. For instance, the estimated cost of air and water pollution from animal sourced food production in the EU in 2022 has been estimated at €181 billion.[66]

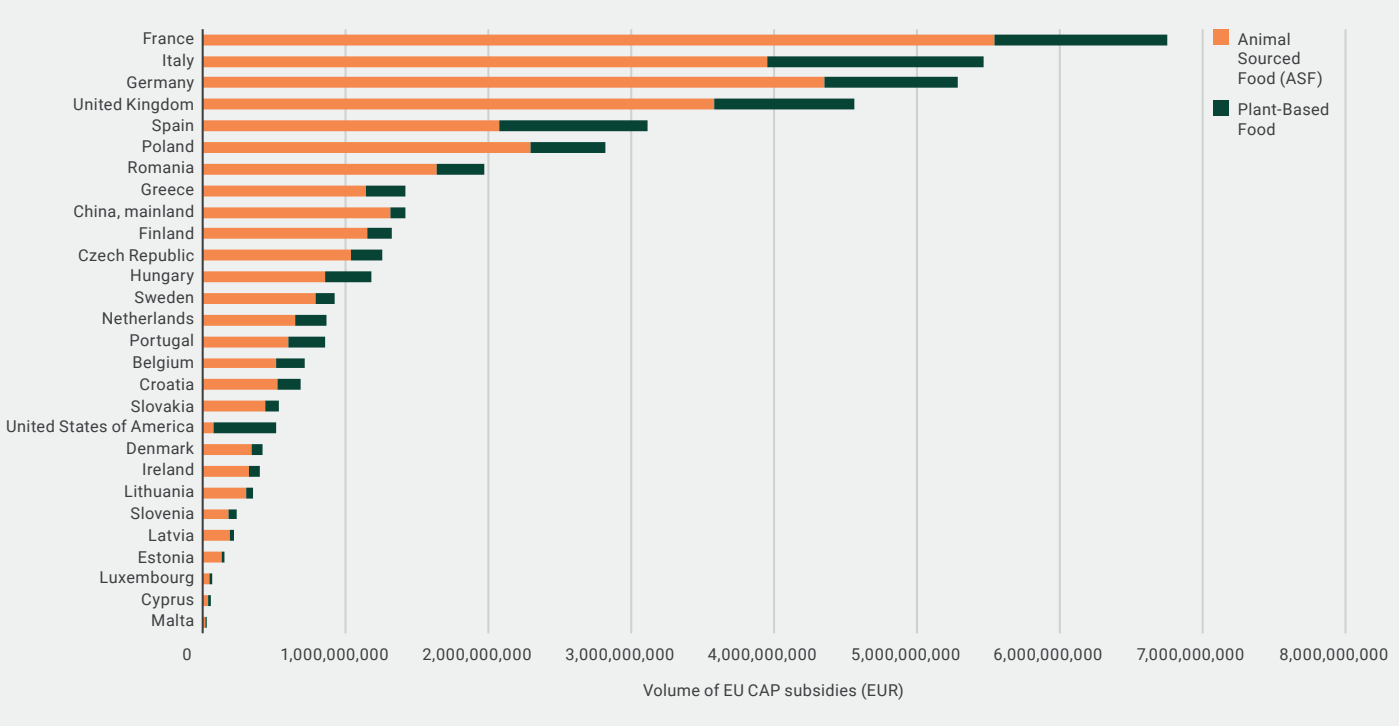
Animal agriculture receives a disproportionate share of EU farming subsidies largely because most CAP subsidies in recent decades have primarily been allocated on an area basis, and animal agriculture occupies a disproportionately high share of EU agricultural land - around 71%.[67] This land includes both cropland – as noted above, an estimated 63% of Europe's cropland is used to grow animal feed[68] – and grazing land – some of which is natural grassland, but some of which is drained peatland or was historically biodiverse woodlands with potential to be restored.[69]

Many of these subsidies were to producers of animal feed rather than to livestock producers directly. In 2013, 38% of EU CAP subsidies went directly to livestock producers and 44% to producers of animal feed[70] - although 2020 data is not available for this breakdown, subsidies for animal feed production are likely to still make up a significant portion of the total subsidies.

Meat accounted for an estimated 43% of the total CAP subsidies in 2020 – 16% for beef, 9% for pork, 4% for poultry, 7% for lard and tallow and 7% for other animal-sourced foods.[71] Dairy accounted for an estimated 32% of the CAP subsidies, and eggs for a further 2%.[72] Subsidies for meat and dairy from cattle and other ruminant livestock therefore make up the largest share of CAP subsidies to livestock, by a considerable margin. This is primarily due to their significantly larger land use.

The CAP subsidies embodied in food produced in the EU are all heavily skewed towards animal agriculture, though there is some variation by country.

**Figure 4:** Volume of EU CAP subsidies going to animal sourced-foods vs. plant-based foods in 2020, shown for selected countries (on a consumption basis )

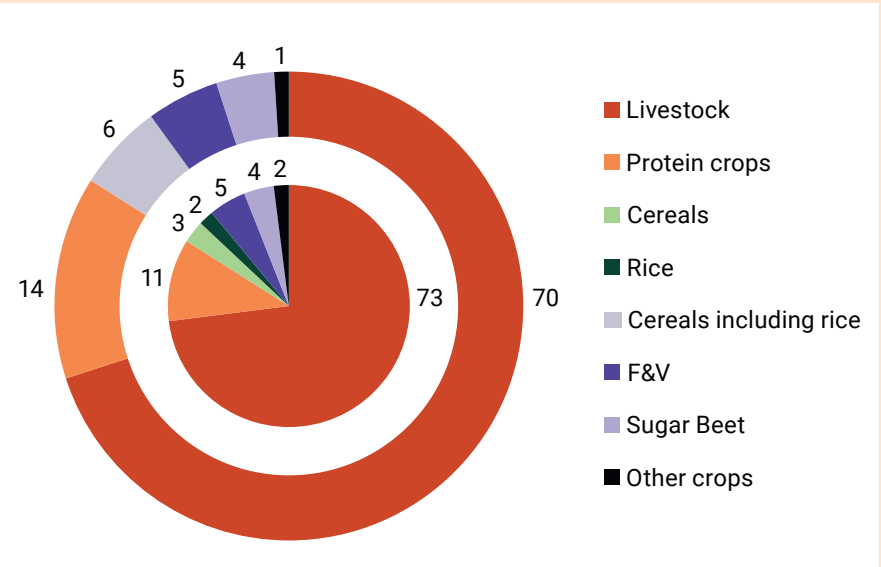



*NOTE: Non-EU countries appear in this chart because the estimated CAP subsidies are displayed on a consumption basis: they are attributed to the country where the food is consumed, not where it is produced. Therefore, if CAP-subsidised food is produced in the EU but subsequently exported and consumed elsewhere (such as China and the United States), the estimated subsidies are displayed under the importing country.*

## Box 4: Coupled Income Support for meat and dairy

The European Commission says that Coupled Income Support (CIS) – also known as voluntary coupled support – accounts for around 7% of total CAP expenditures.[73] A hugely disproportionate share of coupled payments is directed to livestock – particularly ruminant livestock, primarily cattle. During the 2023-27 period, 70% of coupled payments are allocated to farmers raising ruminant livestock.[74] The European Court of Auditors is clear that the impact of this is to "maintain or increase greenhouse gas emissions driven by livestock", because coupled support "encourages the maintenance of livestock numbers because farmers would receive less money if they reduced livestock numbers".[75]

**Figure 5:** Share of an annual financial allocation for coupled support by sector in 2023–2027 (outer ring) and 2014-2020 (inner ring) (%)




*Note: *Protein crops/legumes including mixtures of legumes in grasses in 2014-2022, and Protein crops including mixtures of legumes with grasses in 2023-2027.*

*Source: DG Agriculture and Rural Development, based on CAP implementation data and CAP Strategic Plans.*

*Credit: European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development (2023)[76]*

*Meat isle at supermarket. Credit: Shutterstock*

## Box 5: EU promotional funds biased towards meat and dairy

Promotion and marketing of European agricultural products is part of the CAP, with the aim of "increasing the competitiveness and consumption" of these products.[77] Between 2016–2020, the EU spent €252.4 million to exclusively promote European meat and dairy products, equal to 32% of the overall €776.7 million spending on the promotion of agricultural products in the EU and abroad, and a further €214.7 million on promoting mixed "baskets" of products, almost all of which included meat and dairy products.[78] This compares to only 19% of the budget spent promoting fruit and vegetables.[79] The explicit aim of several of these pro-meat marketing campaigns was, as documented by Greenpeace, to reverse declines or slow-downs in the growth of meat and dairy consumption in Europe.[80] Campaigns such as "Become a Beefatarian" often misleadingly downplayed the environmental and health impacts of meat and dairy consumption.[81] This promotion has continued in more recent years – in 2023 alone, the EU spent nearly €75 million promoting animal products, of which €29 million was for campaigns encouraging people to eat more meat.[82] Promotion of meat and dairy goes directly against the urgent need to shift European diets towards lower meat and dairy consumption – and should thus be ended immediately.

## Box 6: Public money for livestock compared to meat and dairy alternatives

A 2023 study compared public funding for animal-based farming with funding for novel alternatives to animal products (derived from plants, biomass and precision fermentation, and cell cultivation).[83] It estimated that public funding for the novel technologies is 1,200 times smaller than that for animal products in the EU, between 2014-20[84]. The study estimates that EU spending on "production" for animal-based farming was USD 33.5 billion compared to USD 27 million for novel foods for the period 2014-20[85] – a stunning 1,241 times more. EU research and innovation spending was estimated at USD 26 million for animal-based farming compared to USD 1 million for novel foods in 2014-20 period[86] – that is, 26 times more.

# Healthy sustainable diets are a huge opportunity for the EU's Farmers and Citizens

The landmark Strategic Dialogue report – agreed by EU farming groups, civil society, businesses and academics – says that it "observes a trend in the EU towards a reduction of consumption of certain animal-based products and an increased interest in plant-based proteins" and that "it is crucial to support this trend by re-balancing towards plant-based options and helping consumers to embrace the transition". [87]

Indeed, many European retailers and catering businesses are beginning to shift to more plant-based foods as part of their sustainability strategies, and in response to changing consumer eating habits. For instance, in the Netherlands, 11 supermarkets[f] with a combined market share of over 90% have committed that at least 60% of their protein sales will be plant-based by 2030 – up from around 40% currently.[88] A further 16 Dutch caterers have also set similar targets.[89] Lidl has explicitly stated that its aim is to align with the Planetary Health Diet by 2050, and increase the proportion of plant-based foods sold, including plant-based protein sources, wholegrains, fruits, and vegetables, by 20% by 2030, across all 31 countries in which it operates.[90] Catering giant Sodexo claims to have already reduced its total volume of animal proteins by 43%, leading to a 32.9% reduction in total food product emissions, through increased plant-based offerings.[91]

*Green bean harvesting. Credit: BearFotos, Shutterstock*

f Albert Heijn, Aldi, Crisp, Dirk, Ekoplaza, Jumbo, Lidl, Odin, Picnic, Plus and Spar.

The growth in plant-based foods presents an enormous economic opportunity for European farmers. A 2023 study estimated that if the Europeans shifted to high adherence to the Planetary Health Diet, agricultural incomes in the EU would increase by 5.4% on average by 2030 and 36.2% by 2050 as a result of this – though the effects are mixed at country, regional and farm levels, with horticultural farmers particularly benefiting.[92] The significant projected increases in overall farmer income are primarily due to projected growth in the production of vegetables and fruits, and because the value added in fruits, vegetables and nuts is relatively high[93] – and the study notes that this transition can be supported through "redesigning agricultural subsidies and trade policies".[94] The whole European food industry stands to benefit from this growth: the European Plant-Based Food and Beverage Market is projected to grow to USD 83.3 billion (€70.6 billion) by 2030 – over 50% during the next 5 years[95] – and more supportive policies could accelerate this trend further. One analysis found that alternative proteins – plant-based foods, cultivated meat and fermentation-made ingredients – could with investment and supportive policy add €111 billion per year to the EU economy and support 414,000 high-quality jobs by 2040.[96]

To make the most of this opportunity and remain competitive, it is vital that CAP subsidies support EU farmers in this shift. Yet, current CAP subsidies are locking producers into unsustainable overproduction of meat and dairy – locking them in an outdated system which urgently needs to evolve to survive, to build a food system fit for the 21st Century.

## Box 7: The struggles faced by farmers — and their exploitation by the far-right and agribusiness lobbies

The current subsidy system works for the meat and dairy industry, but it is not working for many EU farmers. Many EU farmers are currently struggling: In just 15 years between 2005 and 2020, the number of farms in the EU decreased by about 37% - a loss of about 5.3 million farms, the vast majority of which (about 87%) were small farms.[97] Between 2004 and 2022, the inequality of income between small-scale and industrial-scale farms has widened, with small-scale farmers struggling.[98] In 2017, an estimated 82% of CAP direct payments were directed to just 20% of farmers,[99] and the Commission noted of the 2014-2020 CAP period that "Little progress was made regarding the fair distribution of direct payments",[100] although there are some moves in current CAP proposals to increase degressivity.[101]

It's no surprise, then, that many EU farmers are angry and frustrated. However, rather than address the core problems facing small-scale farmers like corporate consolidation, far-right politicians and agribusiness lobby groups primarily representing the interests of large farmers have sought to direct farmers' anger towards green policies[102] – including demonising any advocacy for lower-meat diets as "anti-farmer". However, as can be seen above, a shift to healthy sustainable diets offers huge opportunities for farmers. The real problems that face farmers – like corporate consolidation and exploitation, unfair trading practices and climate change – can and should be addressed alongside this dietary shift, as part of a well-designed just transition.

# Healthy sustainable diets would have huge environmental, health and food security benefits for the EU's farmers and citizens

## Emissions:

- **The problem:** Animal-sourced foods have been estimated to cause between 81-86% of the embodied greenhouse gas emissions from EU food production, according to different studies.[103]

- **The solution:** A 2022 study found that adoption of the Planetary Health Diet in 54 high-income countries could reduce agricultural production emissions by 61%, whilst sequestering approximately 98.3 $GtCO_2$ equivalent, equal to approximately 14 years of current global agricultural emissions until natural vegetation matures.[104] A previous study similarly found that halving European meat and dairy consumption could lead to 25-40% lower greenhouse gas emissions.[105]

## Food security and cropland use:

- **The problem:** Despite their outsized environmental impact, animal-sourced foods only supply an estimated 32% of calories and 64% of protein consumed in the EU.[106] When cereals are fed to farmed animals, a considerable amount of energy is lost – on average globally, for every 100 kilocalories of cereals fed to a farmed animal, only 2 kcal of beef is produced, or 9 kcal pork, 13 kcal of chicken or 24 kcal of milk.[107] An estimated 63% of Europe's cropland is used to grow animal feed[108].

- **The solution:** Much of EU cropland currently used to grow animal feed could be far more efficiently used to grow food directly for human consumption, reducing the EU's reliance on imports. A 2022 study projected that adoption of the Planetary Health Diet in the EU and UK would almost compensate for all production deficits from Russia and Ukraine.[109] A 2014 study found that halving European meat and dairy consumption could help the EU become more than self-sufficient in cereals.[110]

## Soil pollution:

- **The problem:** An estimated 74% of EU and UK agricultural land has excessive nitrogen inputs[111] – which can lead to nitrate run-off polluting water, and ammonia emissions released from the soils into the atmosphere.[112] The authoritative *European Nitrogen Assessment* estimated that 80% of the nitrogen harvest in European crops is used to grow feed for livestock, and only 20% is used to grow crops directly for human consumption, concluding clearly that "Human use of livestock in Europe, and the consequent need for large amounts of animal feed, is therefore the dominant human driver altering the nitrogen cycle in Europe."[113]

- **The solution:** The Task Force on Reactive Nitrogen of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution recommended that halving European meat and dairy consumption is one of the best ways to reduce European nitrogen pollution.[114] A 2014 study estimated that halving European meat and dairy consumption could lead to 40% lower nitrogen emissions.[115] A 2022 study estimated that shift to the Planetary Health Diet would result in an estimated 23.4% reduction in EU and UK fertiliser use.[116]

## Air pollution:

- **The problem:** In 2022, agriculture was responsible for 93.4% of the EU's ammonia air pollution – with livestock alone responsible for 66.1%.[117] In Europe, agriculture is also estimated to be the biggest cause of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) air pollution – responsible for an estimated 55% of total $PM_{2.5}$ linked to human activities, caused primarily by livestock manure and overapplication of fertilisers.[118] [g] Because fine particulate matter is so small and can enter the lungs so easily, it is generally considered one of the most harmful air pollutants for human health [119] - causing an estimated 239,000 premature deaths in EU-27 countries in 2022.[120] Yet despite progress on reducing air pollution from other sectors like transport, agricultural air pollution like ammonia remains high.[121]

- **The solution:** A 2023 study which modelled the impact of shifts to more plant-based flexitarian, vegetarian, and vegan diets, found that in Europe such shifts would lead to reductions in air pollution associated with a 9-21% reduction in premature mortality in Europe – an estimated 20,000-44,000 lives per year.[122]

## Health impacts:

- **The problem:** The World Health Organisation classifies processed meat as a Group 1 carcinogen and red meat as a Group 2A carcinogen.[123] There is strong evidence linking processed meat to an increased risk of developing bowel cancer[124], cardiovascular disease[125], ischaemic heart disease[126], breast cancer[127], bladder cancer[128], gastric cancer[129], other cancers[130], type 2 diabetes[131], as well as death from cardiovascular disease[132], dementia[133], and all-cause mortality.[134] Red meat has also been linked to greater risk of breast cancer, endometrial cancer, colorectal cancer, lung cancer and hepatocellular carcinoma.[135] Diet-related disease linked to animal-sourced food consumption in the EU cost an estimated €452 billion in 2022.[136]

- **The solution:** The potential benefits of a shift to more plant-based food consumption for Europe's health are staggering. A study of European diets estimated that up to 19–63% of deaths and up to 10–39% of cancers in Europe could be prevented, in a 20-year risk period, with a shift to healthy sustainable diets more aligned with the Planetary Health Diet.[137] Shifting to lower animal-sourced flexitarian diet would lead to an estimated €390 billion per year in savings to EU healthcare systems from avoidance of diet-related diseases.[138]

g Agriculture mainly causes fine particulate matter indirectly, through its ammonia emissions: Gaseous ammonia in the atmosphere leads to secondary inorganic aerosol formation, which are some of the main constituents of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) pollution caused by human activity – such that secondary particulate matter has been estimated to comprise 50% or more of $PM_{2.5}$ in Europe. Source: Susanne E. Bauer et al., 'Significant Atmospheric Aerosol Pollution Caused by World Food Cultivation', *Geophysical Research Letters* 43, no. 10 (2016): 5394–400, https://doi.org/10.1002/2016GL068354..

## Human rights abuses:

- **The problem:** Europe's industrial-scale production of meat relies on the exploitative meatpacking industry. A 2021 investigation uncovered evidence of widespread exploitation of workers by European meat plants, with many employees (particularly migrants) indirectly employed through subcontractors and agencies at extremely low (often illegal) wages with precarious work and limited rights.[139]

- **The solution:** Any transition to more healthy sustainable diets must involve a just transition for meatpacker workers – to ensure fairly paid, safe and secure green jobs in sustainable food sectors such as alternative proteins.

## Water use:

- **The problem:** Water scarcity affected an estimated 41% of the EU population at some point during 2022, with climate change expected to intensify this significantly in future.[140]

- **The solution:** A 2022 study found that adoption of the Planetary Health Diet in the EU and UK would lead to an estimated 4.1 $Gm^3$ per year less blue water use.[141]

## Nature restoration and biodiversity:

- **The problem:** In addition to the high volume of EU cropland used to produce animal feed noted above, large regions of EU land used for grazing are either degraded through overgrazing, use drained peatlands, or use land which was historically native forests. An estimated 0.86 $Mkm^2$ of current pastureland in Europe (about 55% of current pasture area) was converted from formerly native forests.[142] Cultivated drained organic soils (drained peatlands) represent less than 2% of EU farmland, but are responsible for an estimated 20% of EU-27 agriculture emissions.[143]

- **The solution:** If biodiverse native forests were restored on European pastureland converted from formerly native forests, this has potential to store an estimated 7.0 – 10.1 Gt carbon if potential vegetation was restored to its original state, until the woodlands reached maturity.[144] One study found that rewetting just 3% of EU agricultural land would reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions by up to 25%.[145]

# EU subsidies currently support unsustainable livestock production

Livestock producers in the EU are currently extremely reliant on subsidies for their income. In 2020, EU farming subsidies accounted for an estimated 96% of beef & lamb income for EU producers, 71% for dairy, 54% for pork, 50% for poultry meat, and 51% for eggs.[146] This level of dependency means that EU subsidies currently incentivise the unsustainable overproduction of meat and dairy products, by making the production of these foods more economically viable.

Moreover, subsidies issued to livestock producers do not currently come with obligations to reduce their livestock numbers to more sustainable levels.

Meanwhile, there is strong evidence that reductions in the price of fruit and vegetables can lead to increased consumption – for instance, a 2024 meta-study found that a 20% price reduction resulted in fruit and vegetable purchases increasing by 16-62%.[147] There is also evidence to suggest that increasing meat and dairy prices decreases consumption. A 2014 meta-study found that a 10% increase in the price of meat or dairy products is associated with an average 6% decrease in meat or dairy consumption.[148]

Reforming subsidies could thus help with the just transition to more healthy sustainable diets. A 2022 study estimated that if globally all subsidy payments to farms were conditional on them producing healthy and sustainable foods, this would increase fruit and vegetable production by about 19% in OECD countries – which would increase fruit and vegetable consumption in OECD countries by an estimated 55 grams per day (a 10% increase) on average.[149] This reform would significantly reduce EU reliance on fruit and vegetable imports, improving food security, whilst also improving European health. To ensure food justice, some of the money saved through reducing subsidies to meat could be distributed through lump-sum transfers to lower-income groups as well as redistributed to lower the cost of fruits and vegetables.[150]

*Intensive poultry unit. Credit: David Tadevosian, Shutterstock*

# EU supply, imports and demand for meat and dairy must be reduced through joined-up strategy

It is essential to complement subsidy reform with other policies, as part of a joined-up strategy. To ensure that reductions in meat and dairy production in Europe are not simply offset by additional imports, to the detriment of EU farmers, the EU needs to ensure that it places restrictions and taxes on imports of meat and dairy. In keeping with this, the EU must ensure it does not undermine this through trade policies like the Mercosur free trade agreement, which is set to lower barriers to imports of meat from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay – bringing additional deforestation and low animal welfare risks.[151]

It is also vital to ensure that *demand* for meat and dairy declines alongside any decrease in supply. There is strong evidence to suggest that domestic production, imports and demand for animal products can decline simultaneously with well-designed policies. For instance, in Germany, there is evidence of declining production[152], consumption and imports of meat occurring simultaneously[153].

Evidence suggests that rebalancing of prices to ensure plant-based foods are more affordable and meat is more expensive will not on its own shift behaviour to more plant-rich diets at the scale needed[h]. Dietary choices are informed by a complex range of cultural factors beyond price – such as habit and familiarity, knowledge of how to cook dishes, cultural norms, perceptions of health and sustainability, and availability of appealing and culturally appropriate options.[154] It will be necessary to engage with all of these levers in order to shift consumer behaviour, through a joined-up strategy like a Plant-Based Action Plan.

*Farmer in soybean field. Credit: An Mazhor, Shutterstock*

h Various studies have demonstrated that demand for meat and dairy does not decrease in direct proportion to increases in price – in economic terms, this is called price inelasticity. For further evidence, see for instance: Laura Cornelsen et al., 'What Happens to Patterns of Food Consumption When Food Prices Change? Evidence from A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Food Price Elasticities Globally', *Health Economics* 24, no. 12 (2014): 1548–59, https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3107.

# The EU has shamefully backed agribusiness interests over the needs of people and planet, and must change course

Despite the Strategic Dialogue's breakthrough agreement and the huge opportunities of healthy sustainable diets, since 2024 EU institutions have shamefully stalled and rowed back on commitments to reform the CAP. Contributing factors are the rise of far-right parties in many member states and the European Parliament, the shameful alliance of many centre-right groups with the far-right to oppose and dismantle environmental legislation,[155] and heavy lobbying from agribusiness groups including the meat and dairy industries.[156] Across many areas, deregulation is being pushed under the term "simplification" – bowing to the demands of agribusiness – delaying and diluting everything from EU Deforestation Regulation to a scrapped target to reduce agricultural emissions by 30% by 2040.[157] There is even the prospect of a deeply unnecessary ban on plant-based foods using terms like "burger" and "sausage" – driven by a meat industry which wants a monopoly on these terms to prevent fair competition.[158]

In this context, the Commission's proposed revisions to CAP have failed to integrate many of the recommendations of the Strategic Dialogue – and have on the contrary sought to weaken environmental provisions in the CAP, such as by replacing the current CAP "conditionality" system with the far weaker "farm stewardship" scheme.[159] Disastrously, under the proposals, there would no longer be a dedicated CAP budget line for climate and environment – member states can theoretically choose to allocate funds to this purpose, but with little to incentivise this, experts have warned of a likely "race to the bottom".[160] There are some positive measures in the Commission's proposal: for instance, the inclusion of capping and degressivity, which will mean less of a disproportionate share of CAP subsidies going to large-scale farmers, has been welcomed by many farming and environmental groups, though some pushed for this to go further.[161] However, overall the trend has been towards substantially weakening rather than strengthening sustainability provisions.

At the time of writing, the political fate of these reforms is deeply uncertain. In particular, a significant backlash has been caused by the Commission's proposal to move away from the traditional "two-pillar" structure for CAP.[162] After the European Parliament signalled that it might reject the Commission's proposals outright without major changes,[163] President von der Leyen offered to include a "rural target" which would safeguard extra spending for rural areas.[164] However, enhanced environmental measures are yet to be seen.

The coming months of high-level talks, as well as the upcoming trilogue negotiations involving all three European institutions will be pivotal. The need for ambition has never been more important – EU policymakers must urgently change course, and embrace the many opportunities of healthy sustainable diets.

# Calls for subsidy reform to support healthy sustainable diets are growing

The 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission highlight that food system transformation including the Planetary Health Diet could result in more than $5 trillion in savings globally per year.[165] To achieve this, a key EAT-Lancet Commission recommendation is to repurpose existing agricultural subsidies – highlighting that many current subsidies have no public benefit and are skewed towards meat and dairy production.[166] It recommends that these subsidies could be instead redirected to "promoting dietary change", have "clear conditions" in favour of "public goods, such as public health and environmental security", and to incentivise or invest in sustainable and ecological intensification practices, particularly for "opportunity crops that are currently neglected".[167]

Globally, calls to reform subsidies have been growing. In 2024, the World Bank clearly recommended that high-income countries should shift subsidies away from red meat and dairy production towards lower-emissions foods such as pulses, fruit and vegetables – saying that this could "lead to significant changes in consumption patterns and large emissions reductions".[168] A group of 32 investors managing $7.3 trillion in assets have urged the G20 countries to align agricultural subsidies with their climate and nature goals by 2030 – including by shifting subsidies away from high-emitting products such as red meat and dairy, with a just transition for affected groups.[169]

Within the EU, pressure has also been mounting. In 2023, the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, who formally advise the European Commission on food and agriculture policy, recommended that the EU should align CAP subsidies with dietary guidelines,[170] which should factor in sustainability criteria as the norm.[171] Many current European dietary guidelines – and particularly those already incorporating sustainability criteria – already recommend significant reductions in meat and dairy consumption (see Box 8 below).

*Harvesting green chard. Credit: BearFotos, Shutterstock*

In 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on reducing cancer risk which noted "the need to address the overconsumption of meat" and called for the European Commission to take action on this.[172] In September 2025, 20 civil society, health associations, and medical professionals called for the promised EU Plan for Cardiovascular Health to "enable a shift to more plant-rich diets".[173] [i]

In a damning 2021 report, the European Court of Auditors concluded that the CAP "has not reduced livestock emissions"[174] whilst "emissions from fertiliser and manure on soils are increasing".[175] It recommends that the Commission should "ensure the CAP provides effective incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from livestock and fertilisers,"[176] but finds that currently "most mitigation measures supported by the CAP have a low potential to mitigate climate change".[177] The Court of Auditors is clear that reduction in livestock numbers is crucial, saying that "In our review of studies, we found no effective and approved practices that can significantly reduce livestock emissions from feed digestion without reducing production",[178] and "we found no effective practices for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from manure application, other than reducing the amount applied."[179] Yet, the report highlights, currently "the CAP does not seek to limit livestock numbers; nor does it provide incentives to reduce them",[180] and on the contrary, "several CAP measures maintain or increase greenhouse gas emissions driven by livestock"[181]. The report points particularly to voluntary coupled support (VCS) which goes primarily to ruminant livestock, the high "level of dependency" on subsidies of some cattle farmers,[182] and CAP market measures used for the "promotion of animal products".[183]

## Box 8: Reforming subsidies to support revised dietary guidelines

The European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors recommend that EU member states reform their dietary guidelines to incorporate sustainability criteria, and align CAP subsidies with these.[184] The Strategic Dialogue, backed by a broad range of stakeholders across the EU, also recommended that member states should "update their food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) with a view to integrating sustainability".[185] There is an urgent need to reform dietary guidelines: a 2018 study found that the majority of current dietary guidelines globally are highly inconsistent with limiting global heating to 1.5°C, even if all other emissions from every other sector were reduced to zero.[186] The EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet provides global guidelines for healthy sustainable diets,[187] which can be adapted to local cultural contexts – and EAT-Lancet 2.0 was launched in October 2025.[188] Many European countries have begun to integrate environmental criteria into their dietary guidelines – reforming agricultural subsidies would help European countries align with these revised dietary guidelines:

- Denmark's updated dietary guidelines are informed by the EAT-Lancet diet, and recommend that meat consumption is limited to 350g per week and consumption of pulses be increased to 100g per day.[189]
- Germany's updated guidelines also recommend no more than 300g of meat per week.[190]
- Spain's updated dietary guidelines, which are informed by the Mediterranean Diet, now recommend 0-3 portions of meat per week and 3 servings of fish per week.[191]
- Austria's updated dietary guidelines recommend only 1-2 portions of meat and 1-2 portions of fish per week – and explicitly recommend 3 portions per week of pulses.[192]
- Switzerland's updated dietary guidelines recommend a maximum of 2-3 portions of meat per week, equivalent at most 360g per week.[193]

i However, when the EU Commission "Safe Hearts Plan" was eventually presented in December 2025, it fell short of a clear commitment towards more plant-based nutrition.

# Solutions from the Strategic Dialogue and pioneering EU countries show the blueprint for action

The Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture provides a good template for action, which has already been agreed by a broad range of EU stakeholders, and should be foundational to EU CAP reform. It recommends an EU Action Plan for Plant-based Foods covering the whole supply chain from farmers to consumers,[194] and an Agri-food Just Transition Fund which can support livestock farmers to embrace the transition, through financial support and training.[195]

## EU Plant-Based Action Plan

The Strategic Dialogue recommends that the "Commission should develop, by 2026, an EU Action Plan for Plant-based Foods to strengthen the plant-based agri-food chains from farmers all the way to consumers."[196] Pressure is growing on the Commission to do this: over 130 organisations (including Foodrise) wrote to the Commission in early 2025 urging them to deliver this Action Plan,[197] and over 20 MEPs wrote to the Commission calling for an EU strategy on protein diversification.[198] As part of Denmark's Presidency of the Council of the European Union from 1 July to 31 December 2025,[199] it focused "on the potential of a common EU action plan for plant-based foods and a common EU protein strategy".[200] The Danish Presidency's work on this led to significant momentum.[201]

### Case Study 1: Denmark's *Plant-Based Action Plan*

Denmark's *Plant-Based Action Plan* provides an excellent example of a joined-up strategy to incentivise more plant-based foods across the supply chain from producers to consumers – helping build up new supply chains and business models for farmers so they can benefit from this change.[202] This plan covers an extremely diverse range of policies, including:

- **Plant-Based Food Grant:** The grant will allocate DKK 675 million (c. €90 million) between 2023-2030 to initiatives to develop both the supply and demand of plant-based foods, with a special subgrant ear-marked for organic plant-based foods.[203] Projects supported to date include helping plant-based Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) reach full-scale production, boosting plant-based foods in private and public catering, and promotion of plant-based foods to consumers.[204]
- **Greener Public Food Agreement:** The agreement includes higher sustainability standards in procurement and catering for public institutions – including support for more legumes and other plant-based foods, organic food and seasonal produce.[205] It also includes provision of free courses for kitchen professionals in public institutions to learn skills in preparing tasty, nutritious plant-based meals.[206]
- **Eco-schemes:** Under Denmark's CAP plan for 2023-2027, it has allocated DKK 578.5 million (c. €90 million) for eco-schemes to increase crop diversification, "especially the proportion of legumes and crops for human consumption", such as chickpeas, peas, beans, lentils, nuts, mushrooms, quinoa and faba beans.[207] Farmers are allowed to feed these crops to animals only if they cannot sell them for human consumption – meaning that Danish consumption of plant-based foods needs to increase to make the subsidies a success,[208] something which is incentivised through Denmark's Plant-Based Action Plan.[209]
- **Reformed Official Dietary Guidelines:** Denmark's updated dietary guidelines are informed by the EAT-Lancet diet, and recommend that meat consumption is limited to 350g per week and consumption of pulses be increased to 100g per day[210].
- **Other:** Other schemes include DKK 5.1 million (c. €0.8 million) allocated to develop Danish commercial seaweed production,[211] and DKK 54 million (c. €7.2 million) allocated for professional kitchens to switch to organic produce.[212]

## Agri-food Just Transition Fund (AJTF)

The Strategic Dialogue is clear that the EU livestock sector needs to achieve a "sustainable scale", as well as improved practices, to reduce negative externalities.[213] The Dialogue thus recommends the creation of an Agri-food Just Transition Fund (AJTF), outside of the CAP, to support the agricultural sector's sustainability transition,[214] through mechanisms such as "financial assistance for farm transformation", "voluntary buy-out schemes" and "up- and reskilling programmes to transition to alternative production systems"[215] – and suggests the AJTF be used to support livestock farmers and producers affected by dietary shifts.[216]

### Case Study 2: Incentives for crop diversification and reducing livestock numbers in Lower Saxony, Germany

In Lower Saxony in Germany, pig-keeping farms that reduce their livestock numbers or give them up entirely, and diversify their income, have been offered preferential access to the funds from Lower Saxony Chamber of Agriculture's Agricultural Investment Funding Program (AFP)[217]

### Case Study 3: Netherlands' voluntary buyout schemes for livestock farmers

Between 2023-2024, the European Commission approved three Dutch schemes with a combined total budget of over €2 billion, all intended to compensate farmers for voluntarily closing livestock farming sites in regions with high levels of nitrogen deposition – covering between 100% or 120% compensation for their loss of production capacity.[218] As of December 2024, it was reported that around 1,700 livestock farmers had signed up to these Dutch buyout schemes, with most applicants being "dairy and pig farmers from Ede, Venray and Barneveld".[219] These buyout schemes have become more controversial, since they prompted a significant backlash, including farmer protests hi-jacked by the far-right and agribusiness interests.[220] From this, there are important lessons around building public backing for policies and communicating them in a positive way to bring producers on board with just transition policies – it is vital to ensure a positive vision and alternative business models for farmers.

*Pigs in cages. Credit: Shutterstock*

# Policy Recommendations

We recommend to EU policymakers the following policy reforms:

- **Support protein diversification through increased CAP funding and support for farmers engaged in growing plant-based foods for direct human consumption – particularly fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, fungi and wholegrains, especially those that are organically or agroecologically produced. Subsidies should prioritise crops for direct human consumption – with lower subsidies provided for animal feed.**

- **Increase CAP funds available for the promotion and marketing of plant-based wholefoods, as well as alternative protein products made by processing these wholefoods.**

- **CAP subsidies for livestock farmers should be made conditional on meeting limits on livestock stocking density per hectare – tailored to each region, with lower limits in regions with excess nitrogen.**

- **End all use of EU funds for the promotion and marketing of meat and dairy.**

- **All Coupled Income Support (CIS) should be removed as it is known to have negative environmental impacts and market-distorting effects,[221] and replaced with targeted instruments, such as an EU Action Plan for Plant-based Foods and an Agri-food Just Transition Fund (AJTF). However, if Coupled Income Support is maintained, it should be reformed to ensure that the majority is provided to plant-based foods for direct human consumption, and any support to livestock is provided only to production with low stocking densities or conditional on reducing livestock numbers to more sustainable levels.**

- **Support a just transition in the livestock sector, through an Agri-food Just Transition Fund (AJTF) outside of the CAP, as recommended in the Strategic Dialogue final report – supporting farmers through a just transition to 1) protein diversification to produce more plant-based whole foods for direct human consumption, rooted in agroecological food systems and food sovereignty, 2) greater nature restoration, and 3) a transition to lower livestock numbers, particularly in excessively high-density areas. This just transition can be enabled through financial support, voluntary buy-out schemes and up- and reskilling programmes for diversification.[222]**

- **Ensure that CAP subsidies support nature restoration:**

  - Make cultivated drained organic soils ineligible for direct CAP payments – to prevent grazing on drained peatlands, and support peatland restoration.

  - Provide increased CAP support for rewetting of peatlands, rewilding of grasslands and restoration of a mosaic of biodiverse woodlands, on appropriate land – to be identified through a joined-up European Land Use Strategy.

- **Introduce an EU Action Plan for Plant-based Foods to support the production and consumption of more plant-based foods across every stage of the supply chain, which:**

  - Promotes the public procurement of healthy sustainable plant-rich diets in public institutions like schools and hospitals

  - Provides increased financial support through CAP and other means, for the increased production and processing of plant-based foods for direct human consumption, particularly those that are organically or agroecologically produced. Ideally this support should be provided through instruments other than CIS – but if CIS is preserved, priority should be given to plant-based foods such as legumes, wholegrains, nuts, fruits and vegetables.

  - Reform dietary guidelines to factor in both health and sustainability – aligning more with the Planetary Health Diet.

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