

The food and farming system in the EU is the result of different policies coming together over many decades. It now includes policies and laws connected to agriculture, food production, trade, food safety, seeds, environment, climate, nature protection, health, rural development, workers' rights and many more.

Europeans want the food system to provide them with delicious, healthy, seasonal, local food which is produced with minimal harm to the environment, does not torture animals, preserves biodiversity, pays a fair wage to farmers and food producers, and respects the rights of food workers.

But there are also major problems preventing Europe, which is a big player in the global food system, to achieve this. Current food production and consumption levels in the European Union make it the world's biggest importer of agricultural products, mainly raw materials like soy. It is estimated that Europe uses more than two times as much land and water to feed itself than is available within its borders. Factory farming of animals is a particular problem, responsible for 85% of total greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector and a major consumer of global cereal and soy stocks. This has significant knock-on impacts on global supplies of food and leads to millions of hectares of land-grabs in South America.

Despite Europe-wide surveys showing those clear expectations and problems, the European Union has no consistent, coherent or complete food policy to deal with the challenges and expectations.

This is the conclusion reached in a new piece of research published today, written by the University of Pisa and commissioned by Friends of the Earth Europe, European Public Health Alliance, IFOAM EU and Slow Food.

The report - "A transition towards sustainable food systems in Europe" shows that the lack of any overarching framework for food policy in the EU means that the current food and farming system is neither ethical nor resilient enough to cope with future challenges and public health is not being protected.

The University of Pisa assessed 10 food-related EU policies to better understand whether together they contribute to a sustainable food future. They concluded that the EU has no coherent over-arching framework to make the food system sustainable, since the existing instruments are not conceived in a systemic and integrated way to contribute to the sustainability of the whole system. Attempts to follow this approach by the European Commission were shelved in 2015.

The study results in detail:

Policy failure: some policies are failing to achieve their set goals. For example, the greening

of the CAP has failed to deliver the planned environmental benefits.

Policy inconsistency: EU policies conflict with the goals of other policies. For example, the Seed Marketing Directives succeed in establishing a market for regulated seed, but at the cost of reducing genetic diversity, which in turn adversely affects ecological, ethical and resilience goals.

Policy incoherence: while EU policies have the potential to contribute to a sustainable food system, their implementation remains insufficiently coordinated with other policies. For example, there is little connection between EU laws to protect water from nitrate pollution and the CAP cross-compliance rules.

Policy gaps: sometimes policy instruments are missing, or existing instruments fail to integrate other sustainability dimensions. The Food Quality Policy, for example, developed certification schemes that valorise traditional products based on transparency and a fair return, but omitted explicit references to environmental or nutritional criteria

Professor Gianluca Brunori of the University of Pisa said “We assessed 10 different EU policies to judge how they contributed to a sustainable food and farming system. Available evidence shows that there are many inconsistencies, incoherencies or gaps. These should be addressed through an overarching policy framework, able to balance a mix of demand and supply side policy instruments, as well as food environment-oriented ones. We hope our research contributes to building a more ethical and resilient food system in the EU.”

The report comes on the eve of the expected publication by the European Commission of new plans for its Common Agricultural Policy - the EU’s biggest single budget item and the main policy governing farming.

Friends of the Earth Europe, the European Public Health Alliance, IFOAM EU and Slow Food are calling for the CAP to be reformed in a way to help transition towards a sustainable food and farming system within a new policy framework. In a briefing “Transition towards sustainable food systems in Europe” they recommend:

A much stronger integration of health, ethical and resilience objectives into the CAP
Ensuring that Member States are required to deliver on all objectives set by the EU framework on an equal basis as well as ensuring that an adequate budget is dedicated to the fulfilment of the health, resilience and environmental objectives

Ensuring that the new CAP is results-oriented and that the payment system is geared towards delivering public goods, by organising the proposed CAP tools around the above objectives and to ensure coherence with other food-related policies

Ensuring that the implementation of environmental (air and water quality, climate), animal welfare, biodiversity, and antibiotics-use legislation is linked much more strongly to the

granting of direct payments

Stanka Becheva from Friends of the Earth Europe said: “There is an urgent need for the EU to build a sustainable, healthy and resilient food system. The current approach to food and farming is a hodgepodge of incoherent and competing policies that damage public health, the environment and the welfare of the farming community. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy must be used to step back from the vested agribusiness interests instead as an opportunity to start building an agroecological food system that is fit for the future.” Friends of the Earth Europe sees this as the only way for the EU to tackle its responsibility to feed future generations sustainably - both here and in the Global South, and is calling for all food and farming related policies to be assessed to make sure they contribute towards this fundamental shift.

Source: [foeeurope](#)