



ECOS Reaction: EU Vision for Agriculture and Food

Brussels, February 2025

A step forward, but not the transformational shift needed

The European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food outlines a long-term direction for the sector, recognising the need for climate action, environmental protection, and resilience. We welcome its acknowledgement that food and farming must operate within planetary boundaries as well as its references to emissions reductions, soil health, nature restoration and demand-side mechanisms such as public procurement.

However, the Vision fails to present a truly transformative agenda that would make EU agriculture genuinely sustainable, agroecology-driven, and aligned with the EU's Green Deal and global climate and biodiversity commitments. Rather than providing a clear roadmap for systemic change, the Vision leans on voluntary measures and market incentives while missing the opportunity to establish binding targets and enforceable environmental protections. This reaction highlights key areas where the Vision aligns with sustainability goals and where it falls short, outlining the critical priorities that must be strengthened to create a food system that restores ecosystems, mitigates climate change, and protects biodiversity.

A call for stronger environmental action

If the EU is to achieve a truly sustainable food system, it must **move beyond voluntary measures and market incentives** and adopt **clear, binding environmental policies**. We urge policymakers to:

- **Adopt a sustainable food systems approach**, integrating production, consumption, and distribution into one coherent strategy that aims to guarantee economic, social and environmental sustainability.
- **Prevent the further loss of ecosystems from the EU food system** both at home and abroad, such as by extending the scope of the Deforestation and Forest Degradation Regulation to other livestock products (e.g. poultry and pork).
- Ensure **mandatory sustainability criteria in public procurement** to shift demand toward climate-friendly and biodiversity-positive food, preventing a race to the bottom and making sustainable choices the default across EU institutions.ⁱ
- Introduce **mandatory sustainability labelling**, to prevent greenwashing and ensure full transparency on the environmental impact of food production.

- **Ensure adequate funding and finance for farmers to transition to agroecology.** This should include dedicated CAP funding, public grants, and other financial tools that support ecosystem services provision alongside sustainable food production. Market-based incentives can complement these efforts, but must not be the sole solution. They must be carefully designed to avoid misuse, ensuring they do not replace real emission reductions or enable nature destruction through offsetting.
- **Improve data quality from ecosystem monitoring** and the impacts of land management practices to enable better support schemes for climate mitigation, adaptation, and environmentally friendly food production.
- Develop **environmental assessment methodologies** to properly address key environmental impacts from food, including biodiversity.
- **Reject deregulation disguised as “simplification”**, ensuring that environmental protections remain intact.

The Commission has a historic opportunity to position the EU as a global leader in sustainable food systems that can only be achieved through ambitious, binding policies that secure a resilient, biodiversity-rich, and climate-safe future for European food and farming.



Where the vision makes progress

Shift in public procurement towards sustainability

One of the more encouraging aspects of the Vision is its move away from lowest-price-based food procurement toward a “best value” approach. This shift has the potential to create fairer market conditions for farmers while making sustainable food more accessible to consumers. The next step is to ensure that this approach is supported by binding sustainability criteria, not left to voluntary adoption.ⁱⁱ

Commitment to addressing climate challenge

While environmental considerations play only a minor role in the Vision, it does acknowledge the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture, restore soil health, and enhance carbon sequestration. These elements align with scientific recommendations, yet the vision lacks binding emissions reduction targets, undermining its impact. Given that the agricultural sector is a major emitter of methane, nitrous oxide, and CO₂, failing to set sector-specific reduction targets is a missed opportunity.ⁱⁱⁱ The EU must commit to legally binding emissions cuts in agriculture, aligning them with the EU’s overall climate targets.

Recognition of agroecology, organic farming & circularity

The Vision acknowledges the importance of organic and agroecological practices, carbon farming, and the circular economy in building a more sustainable agri-food system. It rightly recognises organic farming as a model for generational renewal and ecosystem protection, emphasising its role in soil health, water resilience, and biodiversity preservation. However, the lack of concrete implementation plans, funding commitments, and regulatory safeguards raises concerns about the effectiveness and integrity of these initiatives.



Where the vision falls short

Lack of a comprehensive food systems approach

A fundamental shortcoming of the Vision is its narrow focus on agricultural production and market dynamics, rather than a holistic food system transformation. Europe needs an integrated food systems approach that addresses the entire chain from production to consumption, ensuring that sustainability goals apply not just to farmers but also to processors, retailers, and consumers.^{iv} Europe also needs a food system that is profitable throughout, has broad-based benefits for society and a positive impact on the natural environment.^v

Weak demand-side measures to promote sustainable diets

The Vision is overwhelmingly supply-side focused, emphasising competitiveness, market simplification, and supply chain diversification. While it briefly mentions food affordability and healthy choices, it lacks a clear focus on changing consumer behaviour or deploying strong demand-side measures and public investment to drive a systemic shift in food consumption. Additionally, the Vision does not include commitments to improving food labelling frameworks, which are essential to empower consumers, prevent greenwashing, and ensure transparency on food production's climate and biodiversity impacts.^{vi} The EU must introduce mandatory sustainability labelling that prevents misleading claims and ensures transparency in food production's climate and biodiversity impacts.

Failure to align with the Nature Restoration Regulation

The Nature Restoration Regulation was a clear signal that the EU would monitor farm biodiversity and support improvement measures based on key indicators.^{vii} However, the Vision fails to integrate these measures into agricultural policy. The EU must ensure that CAP funding explicitly supports nature restoration and that farmers receive direct support to transition to nature-friendly practices. Without binding commitments to ecosystem restoration, the Vision misses a critical opportunity to align food production with broader EU biodiversity goals.

Over-reliance on voluntary and market-based solutions

The Vision largely outlines high-level ideas and voluntary initiatives. It leans too heavily on voluntary sustainability initiatives, market incentives, and private finance mechanisms (e.g., nature credits, carbon farming, and renewable energy certificates) rather than enforceable regulation. While private finance mechanisms can play a role in supporting sustainability, relying solely on market mechanisms risks enabling greenwashing and delaying real emissions reductions. The EU must ensure that market-based solutions such as biodiversity credits and carbon markets do not serve as a loophole for continued environmental harm. Strong regulatory safeguards and accountability measures must complement financial incentives to ensure meaningful progress.

Risk of deregulation disguised as “simplification”

The Vision mentions two simplification packages. With the Omnibus package published in February 2025, it is clear that this is not simplification – it is deregulation, and this must not happen for food. The risk is that under the banner of reducing “red tape,” critical safeguards for biodiversity, soil health, and water protection could be rolled back. To truly support sustainable food systems, simplification must not come at the cost of environmental integrity. The EU must ensure that any regulatory changes strengthen—not weaken—climate and biodiversity protections.

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- ⁱ Florence Pendrill et al. (2022) Disentangling the numbers behind agriculture-driven tropical deforestation. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abm9267>
- ⁱⁱ EU Food Policy Coalition (2022) Manifesto for Establishing Minimum Standards for Public Canteens Across the EU. https://buybetterfood.eu/sites/default/files/media/EN_Manifesto-for-establishing-Minimum-Standards-for-Public-Canteens-across-the-EU_080524.pdf ; EU Food Policy Coalition (2021) Sustainable Public Procurement of Food: A Goal Within Reach https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sustainable-public-procurement-of-food-a-goal-within-reach_EU-FPC-website.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ Oliver De Schutter, (2019) 'Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union'. https://ipes-food.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CFP_FullReport.pdf.
- ^{iv} European Commission (2020) A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system. https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en
- ^v Food and Agriculture Organization (2018) Sustainable food systems: Concept and Framework. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b620989c-407b-4caf-a152-f790f55fec71/content>
- ^{vi} European Court of Auditors (2024) Special Report: Food Labelling in the EU – Consumers can get lost in the maze of labels https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2024-23/SR-2024-23_EN.pdf
- ^{vii} Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1991&qid=1722240349976>