

BAB Briefing: EU Farm to Fork Strategy

On 20th May 2020 the European Commission launched its Farm to Fork strategy through a communication and an action plan. This strategy is a key component of the European Green Deal and is designed to address the challenges of developing a sustainable food system in Europe in order to make European food the global standard for sustainability.

There are three main goals:

1. ensure that food production, transport, distribution, marketing and consumption have a neutral or positive environmental impact
2. ensure food security and public health
3. preserve the affordability of food, while generating fairer economic returns in the supply chain

The strategy is non-legislative, but it will provide the framework through which all and future legislation on food and agriculture is passed. Existing regulations and directives will be reviewed and amended where necessary to bring them into line with the aims of the strategy and the Green Deal, and new regulation must be developed with its goals in mind.

Why this matters to the UK farming unions

The Farm to Fork strategy clearly sets out the ambition of the current Commission for the direction of travel in agricultural policy until at least 2050. We already know the extent to which the EU expects the UK to align with its standards. The so-called “level-playing field” is one of the main areas of contention in the UK-EU negotiations.

The Farm to Fork communication supports this supposition and states that the EU will expect imports to comply with relevant EU regulations and standards. Furthermore, the EU intends to include ambitious sustainable food related provisions in all relevant EU bilateral agreements. This is relevant to the UK as we continue with the UK-EU trade negotiations.

Moreover, as our closest neighbour and biggest export market for agricultural goods, the UK will need to continue to pay close attention to what the EU is doing in the area of agricultural and environmental policy.

Below is a summary of the key points included in the Farm to Fork Strategy.

- The COVID-19 pandemic brings to the fore the importance of a **robust and resilient food system** that continues to function in all circumstances, capable of ensuring access to a sufficient supply of affordable food for citizens
- Farmers, fishers and aquaculture producers have a pivotal role to play in making food systems sustainable...but require the right incentives and support throughout the transition
- the Commission will propose a **legislative initiative for a framework for a sustainable food system** before the end of 2023
- **Promoting the global transition**
- EU trade policy should contribute to enhance cooperation with and **obtain ambitious commitments from third countries in key areas such as animal welfare, the use of pesticides and the fight against antimicrobial resistance**
- The EU will develop Green Alliances on sustainable agri-food systems

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- **Imported food must continue to comply with relevant EU regulations and standards**
- The Commission will take into account environmental aspects when assessing requests for import tolerances for pesticide substances no longer approved in the EU while respecting WTO standards and obligations
- **It will seek to ensure the inclusion of ambitious sustainable food related provisions in all relevant EU bilateral agreements**
- The Commission will reflect on how to take into account environmental aspects when assessing requests for import tolerances for substances no longer approved in the EU while respecting WTO standards and obligations
- As part of its general approach to labelling and combined with the legislative framework on sustainable food systems, **the EU will promote appropriate schemes to encourage trade partners to ensure that the food they export to the EU has been produced in a sustainable way**
- To address the global threat of antimicrobial resistance, under the recently agreed veterinary medicinal products regulation, **products of animal origin imported into the EU must comply with strict requirements on the use of antibiotics in line with the recently agreed veterinary medicinal products Regulation**

- **Ensuring food security**
- The Commission will step up its **coordination of a common European** response to crises affecting food systems in order to ensure food security and safety
- The Commission will develop a contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security during crisis of any nature

- **Ensuring sustainable food production**
- To achieve sustainability, farmers, fishers and aquaculture producers need to transform their production methods
- The solutions require human and financial investment, but also promise higher returns from for instance the direct marketing and sale of high value-added products
- Tools that will be used include the CAP national strategic plans, new eco-schemes (to support the update of precision agriculture, agro-ecology, agro-forestry and organic farming), new green business models (carbon sequestration by farmers)
- The Commission will take action to **reduce the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50% by 2030**
 - This will be done through revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, enhance provisions on integrated pest management and promote greater use of safe alternative ways of protecting harvests from pests and diseases
 - The Commission will also facilitate the placing on the market of plant protection products containing biological active substances and reinforce the environmental risk assessment of pesticides
- The Commission will act to **reduce nutrient losses by at least 50% while ensuring there is no deterioration in soil fertility. This will reduce the use of fertilisers by at least 20% by 2030**
 - This will be done by implementing and enforcing the relevant environmental and climate legislation; identifying nutrient load reductions needed in member states to achieve these goals; putting forward specific actions in the integrated nutrient management action plan to address nutrient pollution at source; and by managing nitrogen and phosphorus better throughout their lifecycle

- To reduce the emissions from animal production the Commission will also facilitate the placing on the market of sustainable and innovative feed additives that help reduce the associated GHG footprint and will promote fostering EU-grown plant proteins as well as alternative feed materials (insects, marine feed stocks and by-products from the bio-economy)
- The Commission is undertaking a review of the EU promotion programme for agricultural products, which in relation to meat will focus on how the EU can use its promotion programme to support the most sustainable, carbon-efficient methods of livestock production
- The Commission will take action **to reduce sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture by 50% by 2030**
 - New regulations on veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed provide measures to achieve this objective
- The Commission will revise the animal welfare legislation, including on animal transport and the slaughter of animals, to align it with the latest scientific evidence and ensure a higher level of animal welfare
- The Commission will also consider options for animal welfare labelling
- In line with the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, **the aim is to reach 25% of agricultural area under organic farming by 2030**

- **Promoting sustainable food consumption**
- **Moving to a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat** will reduce not only risks of life-threatening diseases such as cancer, but also the environmental impact of the food system
- The Commission will propose the introduction of harmonised mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labelling and extend mandatory origin or provenance indications to milk, as well as milk and meat used as ingredients

- **Reducing food loss and waste**
- The Commission will set a baseline and propose legally binding targets to reduce food waste across the EU
- The Commission will revise EU rules on date marking taking account of findings from consumer research

What happens next?

Alongside the Communication that this briefing summarises, the Commission published an Action Plan, which sets out a timetable for the formal measures mentioned in the Communication. All measures will be taken forward in the formal regulation process including evaluations and impact assessments as required.

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