

## A Farm to Fork Strategy that serves Nature

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Nature on land and at sea is in crisis. Recent global reports show that we are changing our planet beyond recognition and losing biodiversity at unprecedented rates, and the European Union is no exception. Climate change is interwoven with, and exacerbates, the catastrophic loss of biodiversity: we cannot address one issue without considering the other, as they are intrinsically linked. Habitat degradation from the way we manage our land and seas is a major cause of biodiversity loss and a key driver of climate change. Understanding these threats, we must act now.

The EU has a huge budget that could start funding this systemic change to a society that respects the rule of law and nature. Misguided incentives and investments in the EU lock us onto a path of destruction. We can no longer afford the status quo. This change must be transformative, and will need to overcome the economic growth paradigm. Change also needs to achieve social justice and socio-economic fairness.

Saving biodiversity is about saving species, their habitats, and their interactions. This can only happen with a coherent set of actions needed to deliver ambitious targets. A **farm to fork strategy** needs to recognise the unsustainability of current food systems and the fact that agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture are still a major driver of biodiversity loss, waste production, habitat degradation, and a key emitter of pollutants. It should drive the reduction of meat, dairy and fish consumption, in order to allow for nature restoration.

### Key elements to a “farm to fork” strategy

#### **Enforcement**

Lack of enforcement and implementation of already existing legislation, and unlimited intensification of production means in agriculture and fisheries, have led to a scenario where only 23% of protected species and 16% of protected habitats are in a good conservation status. The Farm to Fork Strategy should include specific commitments on stepping up in-field controls of environmental compliance in the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

#### **Reference to Space for Nature: Minimum of 10% of obligatory farm-level green infrastructures**

Under the Biodiversity Strategy, the EU needs to make sure that farm-level green infrastructures (landscape elements such as trees, hedgerows, flower strips) are put in place throughout the countryside and at a scale that is meaningful for functional agro-biodiversity. The Farm to Fork Strategy should make reference to the need for consistency with this target that should be set under the Biodiversity Strategy.

#### **Make EU extraction of fish and seafood compatible with oceanic life**

Unsustainable extraction of sea products is among key drivers of biodiversity loss. To restore and recover, the EU must commit to fishing practices that do not harm biodiversity<sup>1</sup>. This includes banning destructive fishing practices and non-selective fishing gear and ensuring that fisheries are fully disclosed and surveilled with 100% monitoring and control of all fishing vessels. Top predators, as indicators for recovery of marine food chains, need to be allowed to recover their historical range.

<sup>1</sup> <https://ipbes.net/models-drivers-biodiversity-ecosystem-change#exploitation>

This is crucial to deliver sustainable fishing in combination with key measures that should be taken under the Biodiversity Strategy, such as establishing marine protected areas.

#### **Address the EU's unsustainable use of water**

Over-abstraction of water is a key problem in Europe, threatening nature and our ability to produce food in the long run. This will only get worse with climate change. Agriculture is by far the largest user of water as a sector, and the Fitness Check of the Water Framework Directive has identified the lack of coherence with the CAP as a key barrier to its implementation. The Farm to Fork must therefore prioritise addressing unsustainable water use in agriculture, and how to implement and enforce the WFD in the sector.

#### **Reduce by 50% the consumption of meat and dairy in the EU**

Unsustainable food consumption is one of the most important drivers of biodiversity loss. The environmental impact of intensive livestock production on biodiversity is immense in terms of the land and water footprint, greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants, yet the EU actively subsidises meat and dairy production through the CAP. Only by dramatically reducing meat and dairy consumption, will there be the land available for the nature restoration we urgently need, whilst still being able to feed our populations. EU must therefore put in place policies encouraging this reduction, including a plan for ending active support for these sectors under the CAP.

#### **Reduce by 40% the consumption of fish and seafood in the EU**

Consumption of fish and seafood needs to be brought down to sustainable and healthy levels. Most Member States recommend eating about 300g of fish per person/per week, for a healthy and balanced diet. However, current average EU consumption of fish and seafood is 500g per person/per week. The EU must therefore put in place policies encouraging this reduction.

#### **Reach 30% organic agricultural production**

Organic agricultural production can be beneficial for biodiversity if done in the right way<sup>2</sup>, and is the only type of “sustainable” production that has EU legislation backing it. Demand for organic production is growing and outstrips current supply in Europe, plus in many countries funding for conversion to organic in the CAP is insufficient to meet farmers’ demand. Therefore, an EU level target should be set to steer agriculture on the right path and unlock appropriate funding to meet this objective.

#### **50% reduction in food waste**

In the EU, the best available estimates show that around 20% of food produced is lost or wasted. Tackling food waste would save land, water and other inputs as well as saving 3.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases emitted to the planet's atmosphere. The EU should therefore commit to a binding target of cutting food waste by 30% by 2025, and 50% by 2030, from farm to fork at Member State level. This means that it should include not just retailer and consumer food waste, but also food wasted at the primary production, manufacturing and distribution levels.

#### **Make EU aquaculture sustainable and independent from wild-caught fish**

Aquaculture can have severe impacts on species and habitats, such as cause eutrophication of the systems, disturb foraging areas for seabirds and mammals, and degrade seabed ecosystems. Member States need to carefully plan where aquaculture is placed in particular by accounting the sensitivity of

<sup>2</sup> <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0216009#pone-0216009-t001>

species and habitats, and the risk of damaging nature. Furthermore, the EU should ensure that aquaculture is not further driving overfishing, by making aquaculture production independent from wild-caught feed. Instead, the EU should drive low impact aquaculture such as extensive aquaculture in inland wetlands that can be very beneficial to biodiversity, integrated multi-trophic aquaculture<sup>3</sup> and recirculating systems.

#### **Achieve zero soil erosion and degradation on agricultural land**

The EU's soils are in a poor state, largely due to intensive agriculture practices and climate change will further exacerbate the problem, threatening food supply and damaging biodiversity. The EU ought to introduce obligations for MS to protect their soils, so that soil issues are integrated into the EU environmental acquis, the CAP conditionality and national legal frameworks.

#### **Drastically reduce use of pesticides in agricultural landscapes**

Pesticides are among the most damaging environmental pollutants for biodiversity, including at sea. The EU Sustainable Use Directive, aimed at the reduction of risks and negative impacts of pesticide use, is mostly not implemented, and the EC needs to start taking enforcement actions across the board. These actions should target to reduce the average number of pesticide applications per hectare by at least 30% from a 2020 baseline, by 2030<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Achieve full nutrient balance at farm level**

Excess in nutrient loads in the environment is a big problem for biodiversity on land, as well as for freshwater and marine ecosystems. The EU needs to put in place a system of controls that halts the discharge of sources of eutrophication to marine and terrestrial ecosystems and that ensures compliance with EU legislation on water and fertilisers. No excess nutrients should be leaking outside of the farm system.

<sup>3</sup> Integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) involves the integrated cultivation of fed species together with extractive species (marine invertebrates and/or algae) that feed on detritus from the fed species. This conversion of particulate waste and dissolved waste into secondary raw materials addresses key environmental impact concerns related to open-water systems.

<sup>4</sup> The EU is still developing a Harmonised Risk Indicator, however, this target should ensure that both, the number of applications, and the toxicity of the pesticide are reduced. Studies show that such a reduction would not reduce yields: <https://www.nature.com/articles/nplants20178>