

Joint contribution to the EU Livestock Strategy

Ahead of the European Commission's publication of the **EU Livestock Strategy**, so far foreseen for 7 July 2026, **the undersigned organisations present their policy recommendations** to support the transition towards animal farming systems that are resilient, sustainable, and economically viable and profitable for farmers, including small-scale ones.

In a nutshell:

1. Support farmers in sustainable animal farming

Farmers should be rewarded for delivering public goods, not pushed into unsustainable intensification. A just transition to sustainable animal farming must ensure fair livelihoods, resilience, and autonomy for farmers.

This means:

- Supporting agroecological, organic, extensive and higher welfare animal farming systems
- Strengthening farmers' position through fair pricing, short supply chains, and alternative distribution systems (e.g. community-based)
- Rewarding ecosystem services
- Encouraging local feed production and avoiding food-feed competition to strengthen the EU protein autonomy
- Encouraging on-farm circularity to reduce dependence on imported inputs such as fertilisers
- Safeguarding farmers' livelihoods and mental wellbeing during the transition

2. Cut pollution and health risks from industrial animal agriculture

Industrial animal agriculture is a major driver of pollution, antimicrobial resistance, and public health risks. The EU must act to reduce these harms, align production with environmental limits, and protect health through a One Health / One Welfare approach.

This means:

- Reducing farmed animal densities in pollution hotspots to match local environmental carrying capacity
- Tackling antimicrobial resistance and zoonotic disease risks through integrated health policies
- Promoting animal farming systems that protect air, water, soil, and biodiversity
- Strengthening and effectively enforcing environmental rules (such as on pollution from nitrates) instead of weakening or dismantling them

3. End factory animal production

Factory animal production concentrates power, pushes smaller farmers out, undermines animal welfare, damages the environment, and imposes hidden costs on society. The EU must prioritise a shift towards animal farming systems that are fair, sustainable, and welfare driven.

This means:

- Prioritising value over volume, including fair prices, quality, and high animal welfare
- Eliminating and safeguarding against harmful subsidies for factory animal production
- Embedding animal welfare as a core pillar of sustainability and phasing out cages and close confinement systems for all species in the upcoming revision of EU animal welfare legislation, in line with the demands set out in the 'End The Cage Age' European Citizens' Initiative
- Aligning trade rules with EU animal welfare standards through import requirements, ensuring fair competition for EU farmers

Supply-side measures must be paired with demand-side action to promote healthier, plant-rich diets and balanced consumption of animal-source foods from agroecological, organic, and high-welfare systems, through public procurement, supportive food environments, and awareness campaigns.

To ensure access to products from sustainable, high-welfare systems, public policies should prioritise these systems, helping to reduce price gaps and provide stable demand for producers. Complementary social measures, such as targeted food subsidies or income support, will be important to ensure that all consumers, particularly low-income households, can access sustainably produced animal products. Shorter supply chains, such as direct sales and local markets, can also help secure a fairer share of value for farmers while keeping prices affordable for consumers.

I. Why the EU animal farming sector is structurally unsustainable

The current industrial EU animal farming system is resource-intensive, environmentally damaging and increasingly misaligned with societal expectations. It relies on intensive farming practices that exploit animals and consume a disproportionate share of resources, with around 63% of EU cropland used for animal feed and roughly a quarter of feed protein imported.¹ This dependence on external inputs makes EU agriculture more vulnerable, erodes strategic autonomy and pushes farming beyond environmental limits, including greenhouse gas emissions, land use, pollution and biodiversity loss.

While numerically the EU animal farming sector is still largely based on small and medium-sized family farms, these producers are disappearing at an alarming rate.² In 2020, nearly 64% of the 9.1 million agricultural holdings were smaller than 5 hectares, with 4.1 million keeping animals (about 45 % of all farms).³ Market pressures, debt and reliance on subsidies are squeezing these farmers off the market. Although farm size is not a direct indication of higher animal welfare or environmental performance, smaller holdings often have the greatest potential to adopt sustainable practices and support rural livelihoods. Meanwhile, more than 24,000 pig and poultry "megafarms" across Europe raise serious concerns for animal welfare, public health and the environment.⁴

The societal costs of EU animal farming far exceed its economic value. Although it generates €163 billion⁵ in production output, external costs of production and consumption topped €1.5 trillion in

¹ Greenpeace European Unit. (2019). *Feeding the problem: The dangerous intensification of animal farming in Europe*. [Access report](#).

² Impact Institute. (2023). *External costs of animal sourced food in the EU* (for Eurogroup for Animals). [Access report](#).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ AGtivist Agency. *The face of European farming. Investigative report on industrial livestock farming in Europe*. Retrieved from <https://stories.agtivistagency.com/the-face-of-european-farming/>

⁵ Impact Institute. (2023). *External costs of animal sourced food in the EU* (commissioned by Eurogroup for Animals). [Access report](#).

2022, driven by poor animal welfare, human health impacts - including from antimicrobial resistance - and environmental damage.⁶ Such costs clearly reveal that an apparently positive trade balance masks a reliance on structural losses and deficits. With 84% of EU citizens calling for better animal welfare,⁷ the sector must shift from quantity to quality, reduce animal density, and promote a shift to sustainable production and consumption.

II. Leading the way in sustainable animal farming

There are already examples of higher animal welfare and sustainable animal farming systems that are based on proven practices, such as organic and other agroecological farming practices. Organic farming is one example of how higher animal welfare and economic farm viability can go hand in hand while respecting planetary boundaries. Organic production systems are underpinned by a rigorous and ambitious European legislative framework.

Another interesting example is the approach of grass-fed and pasture-based cattle systems, typically around 0.5 to 1 livestock units (LU) per hectare, which offer viable models that deserve greater support, particularly as they are increasingly being replaced by indoor, input-intensive production.

More broadly, agroecological approaches provide a clear pathway for transitioning the sector by reducing specialisation, promoting mixed farming and extensification, and strengthening animal welfare, environmental sustainability and farm resilience. The following examples illustrate how such systems deliver benefits in practice:

- **Short supply chains and direct farmer–consumer relationships** increase trust, improve price transmission along the value chain and strengthen the economic sustainability of farms^{8,9,10}.
- **Agroecology as a systemic framework reduces dependence on external inputs**, restores soil fertility and promotes biodiversity, resulting in healthier animals and more stable production in both quality and quantity.
- **Pasture-based, rotational and silvo-pastoral systems**, such as the French grass-based networks, the Spanish dehesa¹¹ and Mediterranean Maremma systems,¹² can reduce dependence on purchased inputs, especially feed, by relying more on local forage resources.¹³ Under appropriate management they can also support better welfare and some herd-health outcomes.
- **High-welfare systems often lead to better animal health, lower mortality rates, lower use of antimicrobials, and improved product quality.** Positive welfare, which lets animals express natural behaviours in enriched environments, reduces stress, diseases and related veterinary

⁶ European Environment Agency. (2024). *Veterinary antimicrobials in Europe's environment: A One Health perspective*. [Access report](#).

⁷ European Commission. (2023). *Special Eurobarometer 533: Attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare*. [Access report](#).

⁸ Eurogroup for Animals. (2023). *Business case: The benefits of a carcass over a live animal trade*. [Access report](#).

⁹ Eurogroup for Animals. (2026). *Economic study on the Dutch fresh chicken sector*. [Access report](#).

¹⁰ Backus, G., van Balkom, P., & Straver – van der Schans, J. (2023). *Towards added value(s) through collaboration in the supply chain*. Connecting Agri & Food. [Access report](#).

¹¹ Gaspar, P., Mesías, F. J., Escribano, M., & Pulido, F. (2009). *Sustainability in Spanish Extensive Farms (Dehesas): An Economic and Management Indicator-Based Evaluation*. *Rangeland Ecology & Management*, 62(2), 153–162. DOI: 10.2111/07-135.1

¹² Ripamonti, A., Mantino, A., Anneschini, F., et al. (2023). *Outcomes of a comparison between pastoral and silvo-pastoral management on beef cattle productivity, animal welfare and pasture depletion in a Mediterranean extensive farm*. *Agroforestry Systems*, 97(3). DOI: 10.1007/s10457-023-00848-w.

¹³ 8. Delaby, L., Finn, J. A., Grange, G., & Horan, B. (2020). *Pasture-Based Dairy Systems in Temperate Lowlands: Challenges and Opportunities for the Future*. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 4. DOI: 10.3389/fsufs.2020.543587.

expenses while improving production stability. Farmer cooperation networks, such as shared equipment, pastures and mobile slaughter units, can further strengthen these systems.

III. Lasting food system transformation requires more than tech-fixes

Technology alone cannot deliver the scale of change needed to build long-term solutions. At most, only about a quarter of GHG emissions from animal farming could be reduced through technical measures,¹⁴ though questions remain about whether even this level is achievable. For example, the efficacy of feed additives over time and in different production systems is an open question,¹⁵ notwithstanding that this is one of the most widely touted possible tech-fixes. It is also not clear whether such supposed 'fixes' create more harms than they proclaim to solve, whether it is from unintended consequences on animal welfare¹⁶ or impacts on local communities.¹⁷

A narrow focus on technological approaches also risks locking in intensive production systems, rather than supporting transformational change. Policies based on tech-fixes exclude certain farmers reaching the same result without expensive investments and scaling up. For instance, research shows that public support schemes to incentivize biogas production from large-scale animal production operations in the U.S. led to a further intensification of the sector.¹⁸ In addition, methodologies to assess the climate footprint of biogas usually ignore the broader scope of emissions connected to industrial animal production, in particular from the animals themselves and from growing the vast amounts of feed needed to sustain them.¹⁹ In a time of scarce public resources, public money should focus on delivering public benefits in clean air, water and nature,²⁰ and not locking in unsustainable systems. The explicit reference in the post-2027 CAP proposal for the support of biogas production without any qualifiers runs contrary to such aims.²¹

Achieving high animal welfare standards, climate, biodiversity and other environmental objectives, and improving human health requires reducing both the demand for and production of animal proteins while ensuring fair prices for farmers engaged in sustainable animal farming systems.²² Such a transformation will not happen overnight. The economic conditions needed to support this transition, including the development of alternative markets, must be put in place. At the same time, farmers need sufficient time, resources, and support to adapt their production methods and, where necessary,

¹⁴ Ecologic Institute (2024). *EU 2040 Climate Target: Contributions of the agriculture sector*. Available at: <https://www.ecologic.eu/sites/default/files/project/2024/60028-EU2040-Sector-Paper-agriculture.pdf>

¹⁵ Expert Panel on Livestock Methane (2024) Potential of animal feed additives for methane mitigation. Available at: <https://livestockmethane.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-03-Animal-feed-supplements-.pdf>

¹⁶ European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) (2026). Call for data on the use of 3-nitrooxypropanol in ruminants (EFSA-Q-2026-00024). Published 3 February 2026. Available at: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/call/call-data-use-3-nitrooxypropanol-ruminants>.

¹⁷ Foodrise (2025). Stop the Biomethane Rush: Biomethane booklet. [Access report](#).

¹⁸ Magesh, V.; Morton, C.; Lyu, Q.; Harding, J.; Curriero, F.; Wychgram, C.; Lupolt, S.; Nachman, K.; Eneva, E. and Ho, D. (2025). *Do Methane Mitigation Incentives Intensify Livestock Production? Evidence from California, 2016-2025*. 10.2139/ssrn.5647670.

¹⁹ IATP (2025). *Energy transition or false solution? How the EU's plan to boost biomethane feeds the factory farm system*. Available at: <https://www.iatp.org/biomethane-energy-transition-or-false-solution>

²⁰ EU Food Policy Coalition (2025). Joint demands on the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Available at: <https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Joint-demands-on-the-post-2027-Common-Agricultural-Policy-CAP.pdf>

²¹ European Commission (2025). Proposal for a Regulation establishing the conditions for the implementation of the Union support to the Common Agriculture Policy for the period from 2028 to 2034, See Article 4.1 (b). Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:5b8a638c-62f9-11f0-bf4e-01aa75ed71a1:0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

²² Agora Agriculture (2024). *Agriculture, forestry and food in a climate neutral EU: Land-use study* (AGR 336), available [here](#).

shift what and how they produce. Starting the planning now will reduce the risk to farmers of being on the hook for sunken costs in the old system.²³

IV. Policy recommendations

Building on the goals outlined for the upcoming EU Livestock Strategy, the following policy recommendations aim to support the transition towards animal farming systems that are resilient, sustainable, and economically viable and profitable for farmers, including small-scale ones.

1. Resilience

● **Support a just transition for farmers and rural communities**

Establish dedicated instruments such as an Agri-food Just Transition Fund to enable a shift from intensive to more extensive, higher-welfare systems and, where appropriate, towards mixed or more plant-based production, while safeguarding farmers' livelihoods, rights, and mental wellbeing.

● **Strengthen feed autonomy and reduce external dependencies**

Align the number of farmed animals with domestic feed availability and significantly reduce reliance on imported feed. CAP support should reward farmers who source feed locally or produce it on farm, as well as arable farmers integrating protein crops into rotations, improving nutrient management and reducing exposure to global market volatility.

● **Support low-input, resilient farming systems**

Promote organic, agroecological, extensive, pasture-based, and mixed systems that lower input costs, improve animal health and welfare, and provide more stable and fair farm incomes.

2. Economic viability for farmers

● **Shift from volume-based to value-based production**

Prioritise quality and high animal welfare, while reducing reliance on subsidies, debt, and vertically integrated supply chains. CAP incentives should reward environmental, social, and animal welfare outcomes, supported by improved metrics for assessing animal welfare. At the same time, subsidies for factory animal production should be stopped.

● **Strengthen farmers' position in the value chain**

Enhance fair price transmission, support short supply chains, and encourage cooperation mechanisms. Diversification, including plant-based production, should be recognised as a pathway to improved farm income.

● **Ensure fair competition in trade**

Extend EU animal welfare standards to imports to prevent unfair competition for EU farmers.

3. Sustainability

● **Set a clear long-term direction for the sector**

²³ Kortleve, A.J., Mogollón, J.M., Harwatt, H., Bruckner, M., Liu, B. and Behrens, P. (2026). *Stranded assets in European agriculture during food system transformations*. Nature Food. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-025-01283-z>

Promote a territorial approach that supports extensive, organic, agroecological, high-welfare, and/or locally self-sufficient systems, ensuring the animal farming sector contributes to bringing the EU food system back within planetary boundaries and towards territorial autonomy.

- **Reduce environmental and climate impacts**

Lower animal densities in high-pressure regions and prioritise systems that deliver ecosystem services, improving biodiversity, water, soil, and air quality.

Eliminate and safeguard against harmful subsidies for factory animal production (including unqualified support for biogas production).

- **Make animal welfare a core sustainability pillar**

Raise standards through lower stocking densities, phasing out cages and close confinement for all species, introducing species-specific rules, improving housing and hygiene, and eliminating harmful practices such as extreme breeding, early weaning, and routine mutilations. This would help revert documented increases in sales of antimicrobials and keep the EU on track for its targets of halving sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals and aquaculture by 2030.²⁴

Invest in regional infrastructure - including local processing facilities and small-scale or mobile slaughterhouses - to reduce transport-related suffering.

A swift, comprehensive, and ambitious revision of EU animal welfare legislation is essential.

- **Embed a One Health / One Welfare approach**

Integrate this approach across policies to address interconnected risks related to antimicrobial resistance, animal disease, pandemic preparedness, and environmental pollution.

In addition, the Livestock Strategy must recognise the need to:

- **Enforce existing legislation**

Existing legislation affecting the animal farming sector, such as in the area of environmental protection (e.g. the Nitrates Directive), must be robustly enforced rather than weakened or dismantled.

- **Drive demand-side changes**

Supply-side changes must go hand in hand with demand-side measures to promote healthier, plant-rich diets and more balanced consumption of animal-source foods from agroecological, organic, and high-welfare systems. This can be achieved through public procurement, supportive food environments, and targeted awareness campaigns. The Protein Plan, expected to be published alongside the Livestock Strategy, could play an instrumental role in advancing these objectives.

To ensure affordable access to products from sustainable, high-welfare systems, public policies, including subsidies and public procurement, should prioritise these systems, helping to reduce price gaps and provide stable demand for producers.

Targeted social policies, such as food subsidies or income support, will be essential to ensure that all consumers, particularly low-income households, can access sustainably produced animal products. In addition, shorter supply chains (e.g. direct sales and local markets) can help ensure a fairer share of

²⁴ European Medicines Agency (EMA). European Sales and Use of Antimicrobials for Veterinary Medicine (ESUAvet) annual surveillance reports. Available at: <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/veterinary-regulatory-overview/antimicrobial-resistance-veterinary-medicine/european-sales-use-antimicrobials-veterinary-medicine-esuavet-annual-surveillance-reports>

value for farmers, while keeping prices affordable to consumers.

- **Ensure inclusive and participatory governance**

The Commission should actively promote meaningful stakeholder engagement, ensuring that policies concerning the future of the EU's animal farming sector are shaped by and reflect the diverse perspectives of farmers, workers, consumers, and civil society at large.

