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Which Common Agricultural Policy for the Green Deal?

Auteur

Pierre-Marie Aubert

Director, Agriculture and food policies programme

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The Green Deal, proposed by Ursula Von der Leyen's Commission, sets the guidelines for an ambitious project for the whole European continent: ensuring a just transition to a carbon-neutral society that preserves ecosystems. Its success can only be achieved by aligning all sectoral policies towards this objective. In this perspective, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) appears to be an essential part of the implementation of the Green Deal, due to its importance both globally (it represents the largest EU budget item) and sectorally (it has structured the transformations of the European food system since its launch in 1962). This blogpost identifies three inflections that are necessary for the CAP reform launched in June 2018 to fully play its role as a "catalyst" for the Green Deal.

Achieving the objectives of the Green Deal: a necessary transformation of the European food system

Building on the recent findings of the IPCC ([Special Report on Land](#)) and IPBES ([Global Assessment](#)), the Green Deal underlines the need to transform the European food system to meet the objectives of carbon neutrality and ecosystem conservation. The European [Farm to Fork Strategy for Sustainable Food](#), to be published next March, should serve as a catalyst for these transformations, in line with the renewal of the [Biodiversity Strategy](#), which gives a central place to the food system. In addition to the need to reduce the sector's emissions, which are covered by the climate component of the Green Deal, these two documents (Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategy) must in particular make it possible to set ambitious targets in terms of :

- reducing consumption and risks associated with the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers (the targets under discussion in Brussels range from -30 to -50% by 2030) - in line with the long-term objective of "zero pollution" set by the Green Deal;
- increasing the area under organic farming (reaching 15 to 30% of the useful agricultural area in AB by 2030);
- restoration of degraded ecosystems, especially agro-ecosystems.

From the Green Deal to CAP reform

The ongoing CAP reform will play a crucial role in achieving these targets—although the final level of ambition is not yet agreed. Indeed, it is at the level of the CAP that the strongest financial levers are to be found in order to initiate the necessary transformations. To understand the stakes of this reform in the face of the Green Deal's objectives, it is necessary to quickly review the main provisions of the text put on the table by the previous European Commission in June 2018. This text provides for two major changes compared to the current framework. The first relates to the mode of governance, and gives Member States an extremely strong responsibility in defining the terms and conditions for the payment of CAP aid, within the framework of National Strategic Plans that will have to be validated by the Commission. The second concerns a new attempt to "green" [Pillar 1 of the CAP](#), through the introduction of an "[eco-scheme](#)" and the strengthening of environmental conditionality. Even before the launch of the Green Deal, numerous analyses pointed out the environmental risks associated with these proposals: the lack of definition of the content and level of financing of the eco-scheme, and the weakness of the accountability framework between the Member States and the Commission have indeed led to fears of a race to the lowest environmental bid between Member States, whose producers are competing for access to the European Common Market.

The mechanisms by which the objectives of the Green Deal will be translated into the content of the CAP are at present unclear and uncertain. However, three major challenges are emerging if the CAP is to be an effective instrument at the service of the Green Deal. It is now up to Members of Parliament and members of the European Council to ensure that these issues are really taken into account.

- Firstly, a CAP aligned with the Green Deal must give the eco-scheme a central place, both in budgetary and normative terms. In the current framework, Member States have an obligation to propose measures eligible for the eco-scheme to farmers, but without the amount dedicated to the eco-scheme being binding, and without specifying the environmental objectives to be achieved. On the contrary, the environmental targets adopted by the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies must be used to set the level of ambition of the eco-scheme in each country (in terms of reducing the use of pesticides and fertilisers and increasing the share of organic farmland).

- The objectives set at the Union level must then serve as a framework for negotiations between the Member States and the Commission on the content of the national strategic plans, thus making it possible to link European and national objectives. In this respect, the logic could be similar to that of the Effort Sharing Regulation, which, in terms of climate change, aims to bring each Member State's reductions in greenhouse gas emissions into line with the Union's overall ambition. It is indeed essential that the additional subsidiarity envisaged in the Commission's text does not lead to a race to the lowest environmental bid, as was the case during the implementation of the 2013 CAP reform.¹ Independent expertise should therefore be available to assess the level of ambition of the objectives.
- Finally, a CAP that can support the Green Deal acts beyond the agricultural component and supports the transformation of the entire food system. In this respect, the failure of the [Ecophyto plan](#) in France is a timely reminder that a strategy exclusively focused on the agricultural/farmer component, without consideration for the restructuring of the sectors upstream and downstream of producers, cannot remove the socio-technical barriers at work today. Unfortunately, reducing the use of synthetic inputs cannot be decreed: it is built by making it possible to re-diversify crops at the farm level, by developing upstream (quality seeds, agricultural advice) and downstream (collection, storage, processing and recovery) sectors. A CAP supporting the Green Deal will have to play its part in the (re)structuring of all agricultural sectors to enable this re-diversification.

¹ Alliance Environnement and Thünen Institute, 2017. Evaluation study of the payment for agricultural practices beneficial for the climate and the environment. Final Report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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