



OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Food security and sustainable food systems

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(Exploratory opinion requested by the French presidency)

NAT/844

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC has been the first EU institution to call for a comprehensive food policy in the EU, with the aim of nurturing healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services, and ensuring supply chains that safeguard public health for all sections of European society¹. Such a policy, now reflected in the F2F strategy, should improve consistency across food-related policy areas, raise awareness of the value of food and promote sustainable food systems.
- 1.2 In response to the French Presidency's request for this exploratory opinion, the EESC identifies the following key levers to be used at EU level to safeguard the competitiveness² of European producers, with a view to ensuring both European food security and sustainability and affordable prices for consumers:
- i. fostering an open strategic autonomy for food security and sustainability;
 - ii. developing innovative technologies and seeds to always be able to provide solutions to farmers faced with restrictions on existing tools;
 - iii. ensuring broadband coverage and digitalisation as a precondition for precision farming and robotics, and supporting the investments in such sustainable techniques;
 - iv. promoting and facilitating access to training on these new technologies for agricultural producers, especially for young farmers;
 - v. ensuring reciprocity of standards and a level-playing field by incorporating the Green Deal's F2F and Biodiversity strategies and their norms as global sustainability standards in all future EU trade deals and having them included in existing trade agreements and in WTO agreements;
 - vi. promoting the value of food, by fostering food education among consumers, which contributes to bringing the agricultural sector closer to society;
 - vii. ensuring fair prices and distribution of income along the chain, improving consumers' willingness to pay appropriate prices for food to consume less but better, and banning unfair trading practices (UTPs) through ambitious regulations;
 - viii. aligning food business practices and operations with the SDGs;
 - ix. ensuring the structured involvement and participation of civil society and of all stakeholders across the food supply chain, including through a European Food Policy Council – fostering cooperation rather than competition.
- 1.3 Furthermore, the EESC identifies the following key levers to help reduce dependence on inputs, including synthetic inputs, and improve the EU's protein autonomy:
- i. the EU should support low-input practices, especially in terms of fossil fuels and pesticides and foster the production capacity of agricultural inputs in Europe;
 - ii. improving the EU's protein autonomy is desirable from all points of view. Imports of soybeans from third countries can be responsible for deforestation, forest degradation and

¹ EESC own initiative opinion on *Civil society's contribution to the development of a comprehensive food policy in the EU*, [OJ C 129, 11.4.2018, p.18](#).

² See definition of competitiveness in point 3.1.

the destruction of natural ecosystems in certain producing countries. The development of legumes and pulses with high protein content in the Union would limit the use of imports and thus have a positive impact on the climate and the environment;

- iii. organising and supporting the protein sector to promote production and convince farmers, in particular through an ambitious Common Agricultural Policy (CAP);
- iv. enhancing the production of oilseed and oilseed cake. With the primary objective of food production, the valuation of oilseeds is based on the valuation of both oil and cakes, and cannot be dissociated. This makes it possible to enhance the sustainable production of food and energy;
- v. strengthening the EU's action to protect and restore the world's forests, notably by an improvement of the current forest certification system (PEFC, FSC) to approve products that do not contribute to deforestation;
- vi. developing short, fair and transparent supply chains and ensuring that the transition towards sustainable farming takes place with a progressive approach to preserve existing balances;
- vii. ensuring the realisation of the right to food for all, in particular for those in economic and social insecurity, and facilitating experimentation in social innovation. Food aid must remain a mandatory policy in Member States;
- viii. ensuring that food can be produced in all parts of the EU.

1.4 The EESC welcomes the "Contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis" and the proposed creation of a European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM), and recommends that these provisions be integrated into a comprehensive food policy³. The EESC asks for an active role in the dedicated group of experts.

2. **Introduction**

2.1 The EESC has been the first EU institution to call for a comprehensive food policy in the EU, with the aim of nurturing healthy diets from sustainable food systems, linking agriculture to nutrition and ecosystem services, and ensuring supply chains that safeguard public health for all sections of European society⁴. Such a policy, now reflected in the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, should improve consistency across food-related policy areas, raise awareness of the value of food and promote sustainable food systems.

2.2 The European Green Deal (EGD), through the principles set out in the F2F strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, offers an opportunity to reaffirm the "social food contract" between the European Union (EU) and its citizens and to promote a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system in the context of the climate and environmental emergency.

2.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented consequences for society and the economy⁵. Across the EU, farmers and actors in the food chain have remained mobilised to maintain

³ Idem footnote 1.

⁴ Idem footnote 1.

⁵ European GDP fell by 11.8% in the 2nd quarter of 2020 (Eurostat).

production and feed the population, despite the difficulties and obstacles encountered. The EU's agri-food sector has shown resilience in providing safe and high-quality food, although there have been supply chain disruptions.

- 2.4 The French National Food Council (NFC) adopted an opinion (No 89) in July 2021 entitled "Feedback from the Covid-19 crisis - Period of the first national lockdown in France"⁶. The opinion concludes that the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis reinforced the need to develop a more systemic vision of food systems, through the implementation of the "One Health approach" at all levels of the food supply chain. This integrated approach to health emphasizes the interactions between animals, humans and their environment. Because of the economic and social precariousness that it has sometimes caused or reinforced, the crisis has also highlighted strong inequalities concerning access to food that are incompatible with a sustainable food system, prompting a reflection on the right to food and food democracy. Access to healthy, legally-produced, affordable and accessible food for the whole population of the EU is crucial to fulfilling the goals of the Green Deal⁷. The EESC considers the target of making 25% of agricultural land in the EU organic by 2030 to be very ambitious⁸ and calls for an EU-wide promotion strategy to reach it without forgetting that consumption needs to follow.
- 2.5 The crisis has also demonstrated that there is a need to step up coordination and improve contingency planning so to be prepared to deal with risks that may threaten EU food supply and food security. The aim is to avoid repeating the COVID-19 experience where coordination measures at EU level had to be taken on an ad hoc basis and developed on the spot. To address this objective, the Commission has recently published a Communication on a "Contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis"⁹. It outlines areas for improvement that were identified in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, principles that should be adhered to in times of crisis, and the creation of an EFSCM. This includes the establishment of a dedicated group of experts involving public authorities from MS and non-EU countries as well as stakeholders.
- 2.6 According to the FAO definition, a sustainable food system "is a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised"¹⁰. The F2F strategy must take into account the consequences of the crisis, but also provide the necessary guarantees to ensure food security in the EU. The EU food systems should "guarantee the quantity and quality of supply to the populations, by supporting the competitiveness of the food sector and by considering the challenges of sustainability". It should also support social innovation.

6 [NFC opinion 89](#)

7 EESC opinion on *From farm to fork: a sustainable food strategy*, [OJ C 429, 11.12.2020, p. 268](#).

8 EESC opinion on an *Action Plan for the development of EU organic production*, [OJ C 517, 22.12.2021, p. 114](#).

9 [Contingency plan](#).

10 [FAO](#).

- 2.7 The EC's Joint Research Centre (JRC) published, in August 2021, a report entitled "Modelling environmental and climate ambitions in the agricultural sector with the CAPRI model"¹¹, which simulates the impact on the EU agricultural sector and markets of some of the quantified objectives included in the F2F and biodiversity strategies (reduction of use of plant protection products, reduction of nutrient losses, increase of ecological areas in organic farming and increase in areas of interest). It appears that these objectives could lead to a reduction of between 10% and 15% in EU production, a decrease in farmers' income, an increase in prices and a parallel increase in imports. The results of this report highlight the importance of jointly considering the agricultural and food transition. As stated in the F2F strategy, a reduction of food loss and waste could prevent such developments. An efficient distribution of the available food resources could be an appropriate instrument.
- 2.8 The evolution of diets is an integral part of the transition of the agricultural and food system as a whole, as are other policies such as trade, competition, health, education, environment and consumers' policies.
- 2.9 The French Presidency of the EU Council has asked the EESC to prepare an exploratory opinion addressing in particular:
- levers to be used at EU level to safeguard the competitiveness of European producers, with a view to ensuring both European food security and affordable prices for consumers;
 - levers that can help reduce dependence on inputs, including synthetic inputs, and improve the EU's protein autonomy, within a framework to support the transformation of the agricultural sector and with a view to a sustainable transition of European food systems.
3. **Levers at EU level to safeguard the competitiveness of European producers, with a view to ensuring both European food security (and sustainability) and affordable prices for consumers**
- 3.1 As mentioned in previous EESC opinions, in order for a comprehensive European food policy to be truly relevant for European consumers, it is essential that the price and quality of food produced sustainably in the EU is competitive. This means that the European agri-food sector is able to deliver food for the consumers at prices that include extra costs for criteria such as sustainability, animal welfare, food safety and nutritional value, but also a fair return to the farmers, and at the same time, maintains its position as the preferred choice for the vast majority of consumers¹².
- 3.2 With the above definitions of food security, sustainable food system and competitiveness in mind, maintaining the competitiveness of European operators and fair value chains should result in fair remuneration for farmers, encouraging or recognising their virtuous practices. Beyond its nurturing role, the food system provides a real solution to the climate challenge, in particular by adapting production systems, storing carbon in the soil, soil and agroecological infrastructures, natural filtration of drinking water, as well as increasing and maintaining biodiversity. However,

¹¹ [Link to report.](#)

¹² Idem footnote 7.

in the F2F Strategy, the European Commission (EC) proposes few concrete actions to strengthen the agri-food sector and the income of primary producers, and none of these actions strengthen the competitiveness of the sector. These key issues should be at the heart of the implementation of the strategy, as they determine its success.

- 3.3 Targeted research and development programmes and the development of knowledge transfer are essential for promoting quality and safeguarding productivity, while ensuring sustainability. Efforts must be focused on providing farmers with practical, accessible and cost-effective technological solutions (e.g. precision farming, decision-making tools, etc.) and tools to foster an agro-ecological and local production, including support to those groups who do not have knowledge on sustainable production.
- 3.4 The EU must also ensure a strong commitment to implementing the fundamental rights of all the food chain workers (production, processing, distribution). In this sense, the EU should commit to the effective protection of the fundamental social rights of workers and, in particular, respect the relevant provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the relevant ILO conventions and recommendations.
- 3.5 The following points could be considered as levers to safeguard the competitiveness of European producers, with a view to ensuring both European food security and sustainability, and affordable prices for consumers:

3.5.1 *Fostering an open strategic autonomy for food security and sustainability*

- i. The EESC has already proposed a definition of **open strategic autonomy** applied to food systems based on food production, workforce and fair trade, with the overarching aim of ensuring food security and sustainability for all EU citizens through a fair, healthy, sustainable and resilient food supply¹³.
- ii. The EESC has also highlighted¹⁴ that it is essential to harmonise production standards to avoid distortions of competition and to enable each country to produce staple foods. The WTO's agricultural safeguard clauses, both the general clauses and those in bilateral agreements, must be improved according to various criteria, which the EESC lists in its opinion. The aim is to ensure fair competition and the sustainability of EU agri-food sectors, guaranteeing food sovereignty for the EU – producers and consumers alike. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the need for food sovereignty. The current clauses are ineffective because the time needed to implement them is too long. However, thanks to the digitalisation of the economy, data can be available within a few hours. Volumes and prices can now be monitored effectively, allowing for a rapid response.
- iii. In particular, EU food systems should be more diversified; the agricultural workforce should be strengthened, especially by attracting young people and ensuring decent working

¹³ EESC own initiative opinion on *Strategic autonomy and food security and sustainability*, [OJ C 105, 4.3.2022, p. 56](#).

¹⁴ EESC own initiative opinion on *Introduction of safeguard measures for agricultural products in trade agreements* [OJ C 364, 28.10.2020, p. 49](#).

conditions and income; trade policies should be aligned with EU food sustainability standards and competitiveness¹⁵.

3.5.2 *Ensuring reciprocity of standards by incorporating the Green Deal's F2F and Biodiversity strategies as global sustainability standards in all future EU trade deals*

- i. The EESC proposed that all future EU trade deals should incorporate the EGD F2F and Biodiversity and Fit for 55 strategies as global standards on sustainability, recognising that integrating and implementing SDGs and higher standards into Multilateral trade deals is extremely challenging. Greater progress on SDGs and essential environmental and social standards seem possible in bilateral trade deals in the shorter term. It is well recognised that trade in agriculture plays a core role in realising most, if not all, SDGs and that the WTO has an important part to play in achieving this; that this would be far harder without an effective multilateral trade mechanism. Closing borders during crises usually makes the crisis worse and is not a solution. The EESC is of the opinion that the EU should implement legislation imposing due diligence on companies throughout their supply chains to identify, prevent and mitigate environmental and social risks, as well as human rights violations. The EU has to guarantee that trade deals will not externalise these problems and increase e.g. deforestation in other countries. All EU trade deals must respect EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) provisions and adhere to the precautionary principle¹⁶.
- ii. The EESC also stressed that without changes in EU trade policies, the objectives of the F2F Strategy will not be met¹⁷. The F2F strategy includes important steps to strengthen the sustainability provisions of the EU's bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and the enforcement of those rules. However, more can be done to ensure compliance with international agreements, and to streamline the procedures for notifying and acting on breaches of sustainability commitments. As proposed by the EC and EP for other sectors and discussed in opinion NAT/834, a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) for agricultural imports, shall be considered.
- iii. The EESC proposes the creation of an EU agency for the certification of imported production following EU sustainability standards.
- iv. Furthermore, the EESC urges the EU to ensure true reciprocity of standards in preferential trade agreements, particularly regarding animal welfare, sustainability, and traceability from farm to fork (origin labelling of raw products, ingredients in processed products, and all food components), building on and mainstreaming what has been achieved in some recent bilateral provisions. It is also essential to find new sustainable methods that can be exploited by farmers, promoting sustainable practices and ensuring that new opportunities for sustainable production can be harnessed by small-scale farmers in the EU and developing countries. These reflections should be pursued in multilateral fora such as the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and Codex Alimentarius, rather than be limited to bilateral negotiations, where farmer and civil society participation is limited, power imbalances are significant, and trade liberalisation remains the ultimate goal. The planned legislative framework on sustainable food systems can provide a starting point. It must serve to

15 [Idem footnote 13.](#)

16 EESC own initiative opinion on *Compatibility of EU trade policy with the EGD*, [OJ C 429, 11.12.2020, p. 66.](#)

17 [Idem footnote 7.](#)

establish a clear definition of sustainable food systems, in line with existing EU definitions of environmental sustainability¹⁸.

3.5.3 *Promoting the value of food*

- i. In 2019, according to the latest figures published by Eurostat, the part of the household budget devoted to food and non-alcoholic beverages amounted to 13% of total consumption expenditure. This constitutes a significant drop from what it was at the start of the CAP. Variable according to the country, it constitutes the third category of expenditure of EU households after the "housing, water, electricity and fuels" category, which represented 23.5%, and the "transport" category which represented 13.1%. At the same time, the increase in the level of world obesity has been called an "epidemic" by the WHO. In 2017, obesity affected 17% of adults in the EU. More broadly, 52% of Europeans were overweight or obese, which means one in two adults and nearly one in three children. Therefore, Europe is following global trends, with an increase in processed foods, but also fatty, sweet and salty foods.
- ii. Several major levers can be used to deal with this situation: the EESC highlights that a common EU food labelling approach reflecting the Sustainable Dietary Guidelines would improve transparency and discourage the use of unnecessarily cheap raw materials that are both unhealthy and unsustainable (e.g. trans fats, palm oil and excess sugars). Consumers would benefit from extensions to food labelling, to include environmental and social aspects. This would help drive consumers' choices towards healthier and more sustainable options¹⁹.
- iii. Price is certainly a strong consumer driver, even more so in times of crises, but quality is just as important, sometimes more according to some surveys. Consumers must bear in mind that the requirements that EU farmers meet, if only through the regulatory base, are higher than those outside the EU. These requirements are guarantees for the quality, health, safety and sustainability of our productions.

3.5.4 *Ensuring fair prices and banning unfair trading practices*

- i. A truly functioning food supply chain is as strong as its weakest link, and, for far too long, the weakest link has been the farmer. The EU Directive on UTPs in the food supply chain is an important step forward²⁰. For the first time, an agreement on binding rules to regulate certain unfair trading practices has been reached. The Directive aims to provide more protection for EU farmers, their producer organisations and retail suppliers. It is only through a binding legislative framework that the balance of power in the food supply chain can be achieved. The organisation of sectors and farmers is also an important condition, all with the aim of bringing quality food products to the consumer. Ultimately, it must be ensured that all those involved in food production can earn fair and adequate incomes and that consumers are offered quality and healthy products at reasonable prices.

18 [Idem footnote 7.](#)

19 EESC own-initiative opinion on *Promoting healthy and sustainable diets in the EU*, [OJ C 190. 5.6.2019, p. 9.](#)

20 EESC opinion on *Towards a Fair Food Supply Chain* (Exploratory opinion), [OJ C 517. 22.12.2021, p. 38.](#)

3.5.5 *Aligning food business practices and operations with the SDGs*²¹

- i. The EGD and the EU recovery plan show the need to decouple economic growth from unsustainable practices. The EU Council's decision on climate targets for 2030 demonstrates that the EU can play a leading role in this area. However, this must be done in the broader context of the SDGs. Food business practices and operations aligned with the SDGs are an essential link to the success of the goals, by setting up these objectives at the heart of the strategies (through activities and ambitious goals, by evaluation of the impacts, and by the transparent communication of results)²².

3.5.6 *Ensuring the structured involvement and participation of civil society and of all stakeholders across the food supply chain, including through a European Food Policy Council*²³ – *fostering cooperation rather than competition*

- i. The EESC has long advocated for a society-wide approach, including more participatory tools, to ensure that civil society – and in particular young people – can become more involved and participate in the decision-making process on sustainability. This co-construction can be done through a European Food Policy Council, which the EESC strongly encourages.

4. Levers that can help reduce dependence on inputs, including synthetic inputs, and improve the EU's protein autonomy

4.1 Reducing dependence on input, in particular synthetic inputs

4.1.1 As explained in the EP report on the farm input supply chain: structure and implications, the high volatility of agricultural raw materials and agricultural input prices has fuelled agricultural income insecurity and hampered long-term investments by farmers. At the same time, farmers are sorely lacking tools and alternatives, as a result of research that does not cover these subjects enough. There is an important need for solid mobilisation and financial investment on agroecology, research into new resistant varieties, new biocontrol methods and precision farming, for example.

4.1.2 Regarding antibiotics in animal production, notable efforts should be recalled, as the European Medicines Agency did, highlighting a drop in sales of veterinary antibiotics by 32.5% between 2011 and 2017. The target set by Europe to reduce the use of antibiotics in animals by an additional 50% could have serious consequences for animal health and welfare and could compromise food safety. There is a real awareness from farmers and veterinarians, who promote, with the support of the governments, an appropriate and reasoned use of antibiotics, which should be maintained. Efficient and affordable alternatives to antibiotics should be developed and offered, as current levels of antibiotics use also give rise to concern. The EESC

21 [EESC own-initiative opinion on Aligning food business strategies and operations with the SDGs for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery](#) (not yet published in the OJ).

22 Idem footnote 21.

23 Idem footnote 1 and 7

fully supports the delegated act proposed by the EC within the framework of EU Regulation 2019/6, which provides for reserving certain antimicrobials for human medicine. Three tools are essential:

- investing in animal welfare (more space by animal);
- strengthening prevention through vaccination and self-vaccination²⁴;
- maintaining and ensuring access to food supplements.

4.1.3 In the F2F Strategy, the EC promotes the reduction of the use of plant protection products and antibiotics and the reduction of nutrient losses due to excess fertilisation, with a view to improving environmental protection, protecting health, increasing the surface area in organic farming and combating antibiotic resistance. Biostimulants can offer sustainable alternatives to synthetic PPPs (Plant Protection Products) and EU regulators should allow SMEs to develop and register such products. Beyond the negative environmental and health impacts of the unsustainable use of farm inputs, there is also an economic rationale in reducing farm dependency on inputs, including synthetic inputs and fossil fuels, provided there are efficient, robust and resilient alternatives. Increase in the cost of inputs would directly affect production costs and either undermines farm income or, if it can be passed on downstream, the price of agricultural and food products. The EESC highlights the need to minimize input per kg produced (chemical input, labour, petroleum, energy, surface, number of animals, etc.). Moreover, the EESC insists on the need to maximize the presence of agroecological infrastructures in our productive ecosystems, to benefit from their many services and, in particular, from the activity of crop auxiliaries located there.

4.2 Improving the EU's protein autonomy

4.2.1 The EU has a major deficit in plant proteins, importing most of what the EU agricultural sector needs, in particular feed material such as soybeans. Despite the increase in value of its agricultural production and export, the EU was a net importer of calories in 2018 (15% dependence on imports). The high level of production of dairy products and meat is made possible thanks to massive imports of protein crops (soybeans and soybean cakes in particular) from the American continent. Dependence on imported food has its roots in post-war trade agreements between the EU and the US. The US accepted protection for EU wheat and dairy markets, and in return, US corn and soybean products were exempted by the EU from tariffs. As a result, oilseeds and meals entered the EU at world market prices. While domestic soybean production has stagnated at a very low level due to unprofitable economic margins for non-GMO soybeans and an unsuitable climate in Northern Europe, imports of soybeans and soybean meal have increased massively (+ 49% and + 87% between 1986 and 2013).

4.2.2 Improving the EU's protein autonomy is desirable from all points of view. Imports of soybeans from third countries can be responsible for deforestation, forest degradation and the destruction of natural ecosystems in certain producing countries. The development of legumes with high protein content in the Union would limit the use of imports and thus have a positive impact on the climate and the environment. At the same time, cultivating legumes promotes biodiversity

²⁴ Vaccine prepared from pathogens isolated from a sick animal or a healthy animal of the same farm and intended for administration to that sick animal or to animals of that farm.

and reduces the use of nitrogen fertilizers. Finally, improving the autonomy of plant protein polyculture-rearing systems reduces the exposure of farms to the volatility of the world prices of these raw materials needed for animal feed.

4.2.3 The EP adopted a report in April 2018 calling for a European strategy to promote European protein crops²⁵, and the EC published a report on the development of plant proteins in the EU at the end of 2018²⁶, also called the "European protein plan". The EC has recently published plans to halt imports of certain products if their production causes illegal logging.

4.2.4 In the F2F strategy, the EC highlighted the need to foster much more EU-grown plant proteins and increase the availability and source of alternative proteins such as microbial, marine and insect-based proteins. Moreover, alternative feed materials such as insects, marine feed stocks (e.g. algae, seaweed) and by-products from the bio-economy (e.g. fish waste) can play an important role in the transition to a sustainable protein autonomy. Promoting an evolution in the daily diets of EU society is a key point. This protein diversification should be done in favour of raw and local agricultural products, in order to promote territorial dynamics on vegetable proteins. Otherwise, the risk is to increase imports and supplies of processed products which are presented as meat substitutes, and which are often nutritionally inadequate²⁷.

4.2.5 Developing plant protein production in the EU can bring not only economic benefits for farmers and producers of food and animal feed, but also a wide range of environmental and climatic advantages. In particular, protein crops contribute to fixing the atmosphere's nitrogen in the soil and therefore play an important role in a more sustainable nitrogen cycle. On the other hand, farmers again face a significant lack of applied research on resistant, sufficient yielding and adapted varieties.

4.2.6 The following points could be considered as levers to improve the EU protein autonomy:

- i. Enhancing the production of oilseed and oilseed cake. With the primary objective of food production, the valuation of oilseeds is based on the valuation of both oil and cakes, and cannot be dissociated. This makes it possible to enhance the sustainable production of food and energy. The availability of European rapeseed is cause for concern in this regard: from a level of 3.8 million tons of pure protein during the 2017/2018 harvest to 2.66 million tons of pure protein during the 2020/2021 harvest. Such evolutions are reflected in the import of seeds and meals, mainly soybeans. The drop in volume of European rapeseed is the result of both unfavourable climatic conditions and difficulties in cultivating crops with the increase in regulatory constraints and the reduction in the means of production available. Producers outside Europe have significant competitive advantages in this context, such as the use of selection techniques, tolerant varieties to herbicides etc. Mirror clauses are essential in this context.
- ii. Organising and supporting the protein sector to promote production and convince farmers, in particular through an ambitious CAP. The CAP already provides a series of measures which

25 [EP report.](#)

26 [COM\(2018\) 757 final.](#)

27 [Survey CLCV.](#) **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

directly or indirectly have encouraged plant protein production in the EU in recent years, but a more strategic and ambitious approach is needed. The CAP budget is not sufficient to make up for the economics that are against plant protein production in Europe. A global increase of the CAP budget would be necessary, accordingly.

- iii. Relying on research:
 - a. to optimise the protein intake in livestock feed and highlight the role of pastures/ clovers as an important source of protein for ruminants;
 - b. to identify the role seafood may play, e.g. farmed fish and seafood generate a lower carbon footprint than animal production on land, and sequester carbon. Seaweed snacks are already available on the market. However, this takes up a lot of minerals like iron, and therefore care should be taken not to upset the balance in waters. Thus, aquaculture can play an important role in the protein autonomy of the EU through the production of sustainable foods and animals feeds, and the development of new bioproducts such as food additives and new materials based on algae and other marine organisms. Furthermore, the blue economy has an ever-increasing potential in enhancing the EU economy, quality employment and people's welfare in various locations, with specific benefits for coastal and rural areas.
 - c. Farmers need to benefit more from knowledge transfer and awareness raising on the cultivation and production of legumes at several levels: yield, choice of varieties, pest attacks, solutions etc.
- iv. Promoting extensive livestock breeding²⁸ as a way of producing sustainable animal proteins, while fostering the carbon sink potential of pastures and the associated agroecological infrastructures. Extensive and silvo-agriculture can enhance resilience against forest fires.

4.2.7 The EESC is planning to develop a proposal for a strategy to achieve a sustainable protein and plant oil open autonomy in the EU by analysing the potential of EU-grown plants, EU aquaculture, extensive livestock breeding, and other protein sources such as insects, algae and urban food systems.

Brussels, 19 January 2022

Christa Schweng
The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

²⁸ EESC information report on [Benefits of extensive livestock farming and organic fertilizers in the context of the European Green Deal](#).