

OPINION

ONLY A NUTRITION-SENSITIVE CAP CAN DELIVER ON CLIMATE AND HEALTH

By Nikolai Pushkarev, Policy coordinator, European Public Health Alliance and Susanne Løgstrup, Director, European Heart Network

The evidence is clear: to secure a thriving future for people and planet we need to collectively [transform](#) our eating patterns towards healthier, more plant-rich diets. The EU's common agricultural policy (CAP), now under reform, can facilitate this transition. But several misunderstandings hinder progress.

First, the CAP is not only about agricultural production.

It finances demand-oriented measures as well, and these do not align with EU health objectives. Today, for instance, more money under the CAP is spent on promoting wines – nearly €220 million each year between [2014-2018](#), than on fruit and vegetables for schoolchildren – which only receives an annual [allocation](#) of €150 million.

The practice of creating markets for agricultural products is already part-and-parcel of the CAP. This approach should be further developed into a strategy to stimulate demand for healthy and sustainable foods, for instance by supporting national healthy and green public food procurement. Such an approach can provide [co-benefits](#) for health – notably to help tackle non-communicable diseases, environment and farmers, who can be led by clear market signals.

Second, there is no time to wait for the next reform to make bold steps forward.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [concludes](#) that “deep emissions reductions in all sectors” will be required in the next decade to avoid disruptive climate change. The ‘new’ CAP period runs from 2021 to 2027, so well into that next decade. This means that incentives introduced today must effectively reward measures that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and enhance biodiversity.

But, as studies find [time](#) after [time](#), changing production practices alone will not be enough and dietary [change is critical](#). The IPCC also [identifies](#) “low GHG-intensive food consumption” as a main pathway towards not exceeding a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures.

The share of animal products in the diet is the [most important factor](#) determining the climate footprint of EU food consumption. Fortunately, the interests of health and environment generally coincide: there is robust [evidence](#) that a strategy focused on dietary change towards more plant-based diets in line with healthy eating guidelines can both reduce emissions and improve nutrition.

Third, the need to transform eating patterns is not a plot against farmers.

Vegetables, fruit, pulses, nuts, berries, whole grains are all agricultural products we should consume and produce more of. Likewise, the recommendation to reduce animal products is not about turning the world vegan. Animal products can be integral components of healthy diets, and animals, when within [planetary boundaries](#), integral parts of diverse, well-functioning agricultural systems.

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The CAP, with its significant budget, is a unique opportunity to provide transition funding to support farmers to achieve added value in a “more and increasingly diverse” plant-based, and “[less and better](#)” animal products future. This makes it the more important that the budget is used wisely and not squandered on counterproductive measures.

The European Parliament’s Agriculture (AGRI) committee now holds the key to the future of the CAP, but also to its own credibility. Recently, the Environment and Public Health (ENVI) committee made admirable steps towards setting a healthier and more sustainable course.

AGRI must keep up this standard, and can even do better. It has the opportunity to add an impact indicator focused on improving access to fruit and vegetables (AM 5089). The adoption of this indicator would mandate nation CAP strategic plans to pursue an increase in fruit and vegetables intake.

It would be like planting the seed for a wonderful transition.