

# What's next for the CAP?

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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How should the CAP change after 2027 to take greater account of the socio-economic needs of all participants in the food chain? How to use it to ensure food security for current and future generations? How to make it finally serve the protection of the environment and climate? The following recommendations provide a partial answer to these questions. They indicate the most important directions of change, and at the same time summarise conclusions and recommendations presented in the report **What's next for the CAP? Conclusions from and recommendations for the to-date implementation of the Polish Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027.**



Water retention on permanent grassland. Photo: W. Król.

### 1 AMOUNT AND DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS ALLOCATED TO AGRICULTURE

Mechanisms that allow more fair distribution of funds, i.e. capping or degressivity of payments, have already been introduced into the CAP. Their aim is to stop the outflow of the lion's share of funds to entities using the most agricultural land. These mechanisms should be maintained, but the most appropriate direction

would be to withdraw support for farming that uses industrial methods of agricultural production, especially large-scale livestock production and large-scale, monoculture crop cultivation. These systems of production are not sustainable; they lack resilience to crises, which they often exacerbate themselves. **Public money should be prioritised for strengthening the sustainability of**

**agricultural production and improving its resilience. The priority should be to direct public support to farmers whose economic situation does not allow them to introduce such changes on their own.** It should certainly not be used by agricultural production sectors that make high profits while at the same time shifting costs (e.g. aid in the event of drought losses, compensation for epizootics) to public spending.



Water retention on permanent grassland. Photo: W. Król.

## 2 FUNDS FOR PUBLIC GOODS

For a long time, there has been a discussion about abandoning payments per hectare and replacing them with alternative ways of supporting the profitability of farms. The most common proposal is to **reward farmers for providing public goods, which include increasing the biological and landscape diversity, water retention, ensuring high quality of surface waters and improving the quality of soils**. More broadly, public goods are also the provision of high-quality food (due to its beneficial impact on improving public health) and the improvement of quality of life (both in rural areas and beyond), e.g. due to reduced emissions of various types of pollutants from agricultural production. Finally, the beneficial impact of agricultural activity on the development of diverse functions of rural areas can be considered a public good. Currently, the only way to reward farmers for environmental and climate practices, as well as practices that are designed to benefit the safety, quality of food and welfare of farm animals, is compensation for “costs incurred and lost profits”. In the case of many of the most ambitious and at the same time demanding solutions, such remuneration is insufficient. Therefore, the **amount of payments under voluntary pro-environmental practices must increase significantly**, thus taking into account the value of public goods. We need to reject the compensatory approach in order to finally focus attention on the crucial role of the value of public goods, both for agriculture and for society as a whole.

## 3 PAYMENTS BASED ON RESULTS

**Priority should be given to accounting for CAP funds received by beneficiaries on a result-based basis.** After all, their granting is supposed to result

in the achievement of a specific and measurable result of the farming practice. It is pointless to use practices that do not give the expected result (for example, increasing biodiversity). In some cases, hybrid systems, based on both requirements and performance, with a reward for achieving results, can be a good alternative. From the farmer's point of view, such systems reduce the risk of losing the entire payment if, for reasons beyond the farmer's control, the assumed result has not been achieved. The rules for paying compensation for losses in agricultural activity should also be changed and made dependent on the farmer's prior practices for the protection of water, soil, air, biodiversity or farm animal welfare. Examples include drought compensation, received despite the fact that no action has been taken on the farm to improve water retention, as well as compensation for losses due to epizootics, paid to entities that have not sought to improve animal welfare.

## 4 MONITORING OF RESULTS, UNIFICATION OF INDICATORS

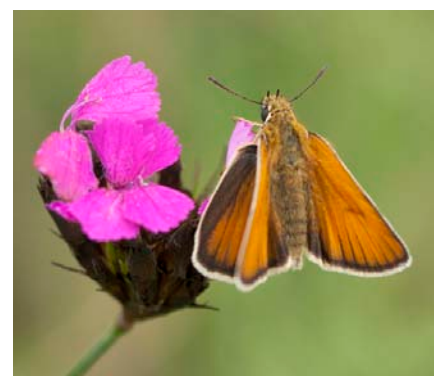
**For GAEC standards and eco-schemes, indicators of environmental and climate effects should be defined already at the stage of their definition and planning, which would then be monitored.** The basis for assessing the effects of the adopted and financed solutions should be the monitoring of the natural and environmental effects of the implementation of individual farming practices. Currently, such monitoring is carried out only in relation to agri-environment-climate measures aimed at the extensive use of selected natural habitats. A major oversight is the lack of monitoring in relation to GAEC standards and eco-schemes, as the knowledge gathered in this way

is necessary to improve the adopted solutions and processes related to their implementation.

## 5 NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND LANDSCAPE COLLABORATION

More effective **implementation of nature-based solutions requires a landscape approach, i.e. their planning and implementation at the scale of the landscape or ecosystem, not just individual farms**. This applies in particular to water retention, protection and restoration of peat bogs, semi-natural meadows and buffer zones. **The CAP should introduce the possibility of collective interventions and encourage farmers to cooperate, as coordination at landscape scale allows for better results.** For some practices, especially those related to water retention on agricultural land, coordination may be the only solution to achieve effective large-scale landscape water retention. A great advantage is also the reduction of transaction costs on individual farms. It is important that the implementation of activities at the landscape level uses the applicable planning documents, especially plans of conservation tasks of Natura 2000 areas. However, joint implementation of nature-based solutions must also be possible outside of Natura 2000 sites. Currently, “easy” solutions dominate, implemented only at the level of individual farms, which do not significantly exceed the applicable standards, and their environmental effects are small. The availability of incentives for nature-based solutions is limited (few interventions, modest resources) and they are not very popular among farmers. Therefore, a broad educational and information campaign on such solutions is necessary (see point 13).

Another mechanism for the distribution of funds provided for in the CAP is the prohibition of combining certain



The Essex skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) butterfly on a Carthusian pink (*Dianthus carthusianorum*) flower – grassed area. Photo: A. Pepkowska-Król.



payments. However in certain cases, the possibility of combining them could have a positive impact on environmental and climate protection in agriculture, which is why it is worth considering introducing it in the future. It should concern interventions whose combined use increases the level of protection to the greatest extent, provides economic motivation for farmers or brings other social benefits.

## **6 COMBINING PLANT AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION**

In the planning of interventions, **priority should be given to support for farms that combine crop and animal production, with a preference for those that use grazing, so as to strive for a closed cycle of production (circular economy) on a farm. This will reduce farmers' dependence on the purchase of external means for production, for which they have to pay increasingly higher prices.** This combination has a positive effect on soil protection and allows (at least partially) for mineral fertilisers to be given up. In addition, it can also result in the dispersion of animal production and a reduction in its intensity, and thus – an improvement in the welfare of farm animals, an increase in their resistance to diseases and a reduction in environmental pollution, both on spot and local levels. This is also advisable due to the need to protect and restore semi-natural meadows and pastures. Agricultural production systems that combine crop cultivation with livestock breeding or animal husbandry, such as extensive grazing, agroforestry and organic farming, should be rewarded. It is also worth supporting the cooperation between



Cattle grazing on salt meadows in the Beka Nature Reserve. Photo: B. Błaszowska.

farms within the circular economy, for example, supplying high-quality natural fertilisers by farms with animal production to farms that specialise in fruit or vegetables.

## **7 LIVESTOCK WELFARE**

Currently, it is not possible to assess the results of the Animal Welfare eco-scheme, both in terms of improving animal life and reducing the use of antibiotics in animal production, as well as environmental and climate protection. This should change, and **improvements in welfare should be combined with practices that benefit the ecosystems.**

In addition, it is necessary to, as soon as possible, exclude from this intervention the possibility of using practices that have nothing to do with animal welfare and to subject the eco-scheme to a thorough verification to assess whether these practices actually exceed

the legally accepted minimum in farm animal protection. The best solution would be the development of animal production in the organic farming system, as it legally regulates high (and not only increased) animal welfare standards, and the organic farming logo is recognized by many consumers.

## **8 SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET**

The Strategic Plan can be better used to support the development of the market for organic products, which will increase the income of organic farmers. It is beneficial for environmental protection and also increases consumer access to high-quality food. The sustainability of the supply and demand of organic products can be maintained through an appropriate combination of environmental payments to farmers and interventions to support investment in organic farms, and by stimulating demand for organic products. An important element of the latter should be **green public procurement and the systemic introduction of organic food to meals offered in educational institutions for children and youth.**

## **9 PROMOTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN ORGANIC FARMING**

The Strategic Plan funds should be used more effectively in order to disseminate knowledge about the production system in organic farming among producers, especially farmers. These measures must be accompanied by **the actual simplification of legal provisions and the removal of unnecessary bureaucratic barriers,**



An extensively used salt meadow in the Krasiborska Kępa Reserve of the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP). Photo: A. Niedźwiecka.



Biodiversity in an agricultural landscape: the black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*).  
Photo: A. Pępkowska-Król.

as well as less burdensome but more effective controls. Promoting the European logo of organic production in the EU, as well as the environmental and consumer benefits of organic farming, are an essential complement to the development of the organic food market.

**10 ENSURING ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR ORGANIC FARMS** Direct financial support for organic farmers in the form of environmental payments for cultivation areas, sustainable crop and livestock production, as well as the costs of inspection and certification, is an important incentive instrument. This system should be maintained and improved on an ongoing basis. It is important to ensure an appropriate level of payment that satisfies farmers, ensuring that they are remunerated for the public goods they provide.

**11 SUPPORT FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS** Planning and financing of cooperation must not be limited solely to food-producing entities (food producers and processors). The amount of CAP funds directed to such cooperation is inadequate to the achieved result,

which is primarily to strengthen the position of farmers on the market. **Financial support from the CAP should be directed towards the development of direct cooperation between farmers and consumers**, for example in the form of food cooperatives or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). This would bring many benefits, like shortening the supply chain, excluding intermediaries (better income and better price), better adapting the offer to consumer expectations while increasing production flexibility, and reducing the amount of food waste. The social benefit is no less important: it consists in bringing together different social groups, building trust and a sense of shared responsibility for food production, and spreading knowledge about the importance of farmers in the process of ensuring quality food.

**12 A DIFFERENT VIEW ON THE ROLE OF SMALL FARMS** Evaluating the importance of small farms solely by comparing their economic strength to larger farms (especially high-yield farms) should be abandoned. This approach negates the role of small farms as places of food production, especially on a local scale: ensuring food security, providing high-

quality food and the possibility of establishing direct cooperation with consumers. **Small farms perform many functions, including social and cultural, and determine the possibility of sustainable development of rural areas.** They also have the greatest potential to provide ecosystem-based public goods, including biodiversity. However, the measures taken so far to protect small farms financed by the CAP are insufficient and do not prevent the decline in their number. In addition, there is a clear gap between the planning of CAP measures for small farms, which does not consider market barriers and negative approaches to small farms in national policies. The mistargeting of CAP measures does not allow these farms to be active in food production again.

**13 EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION, CONSULTING** The beneficiaries of public funds must understand the purpose of the funded measure, accept it and be convinced that its implementation will bring personal and social benefits. A legitimate question arises as to what extent the current farm advisory system and agricultural education curricula support farmers in taking measures to better protect natural resources and see the associated benefits, especially since they only become visible after a long time. They should be widely communicated as part of an **educational campaign on nature-based solutions** and other environmentally-friendly practices. Policymakers need to start treating spending on nature-based solutions as an investment with a high rate of return. Based on research, it can be concluded **that it is possible to achieve high social acceptance for incurring the costs of restoring and protecting natural resources, but this requires effective campaign activities.** If it is possible to encourage farmers to use new technologies in this way, it can certainly also be done with regard to better protection of nature and the environment – the choice to use nature-based solutions.

The recommendations were prepared by the authors of the report *What's next for the CAP? Conclusions from and recommendations for the to-date implementation of the Polish Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027* (only available in Polish).

In the publication, we undertake an assessment of selected interventions of the SP for CAP 2023-2027 to determine whether they actually lead to the improvement of natural resources, stopping the climate crisis and protecting small farms.

Report available in Polish:



[pl.boell.org/pl/2025/05/21/co-dalej-z-wpr](https://pl.boell.org/pl/2025/05/21/co-dalej-z-wpr)