



Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change. With 200 member organisations active in 40 European countries, representing over 1,700 NGOs and more than 40 million citizens, CAN Europe promotes sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe.

23 March 2026

CAN Europe on AGRIFISH Council 30 March

Dear AGRIFISH Ministers,

we write to you as the Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe - a coalition of over 200 civil society organisations working to advance ambitious climate policy across Europe. Here we refer in particular to the new report published by the [European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change \(ESABCC\)](#) on 11 March 2026 and your discussions at AGRIFISH Council on 30 March to take stock one year after the release of the Vision for Agriculture and Food.

At a critical moment for EU agricultural and climate policy, we urge you to ensure that European farming is equipped to meet the challenges it is confronted with. The response to that reality is not to avoid action, but to design and fund a transition that protects livelihoods, secures incomes, and builds a resilient and sustainable sector for the future. It furthermore needs to contribute its fair share in line with the EU's own commitments and the scientific evidence. As the ESABCC has highlighted, “many solutions, such as practices that increase soil carbon, dietary shifts, food waste reductions, agroforestry and agrivoltaics, can deliver benefits for both climate adaptation and mitigation, as well as broader environmental and socio-economic goals.”

Why EU Agriculture Must Contribute to Climate Protection

According to the ESABCC, “agricultural losses from extreme weather events currently amount to around EUR 28 billion per year on average and are projected to increase to around EUR 40 billion per year on average by mid-century.” Furthermore, agriculture accounts for approximately 13% of total EU greenhouse gas emissions, with around two-thirds attributable to livestock farming for meat and milk production alone. Yet the sector has delivered only a 7% reduction in emissions between 2005 and 2023, compared to roughly one-third reductions economy-wide.

Now that the 2040 intermediate climate target has been enshrined into law, it is time to elaborate on the quantitative contributions from various sectors, and the mechanisms for getting there. In the Vision for Agriculture and Food, the Commission also promised that it “will consider pathways for the contribution of the agricultural sector to the EU's 2040 climate target”.

The ESABCC report highlights that “available scenarios suggest that a systemic transition could reduce agricultural non-CO₂ emissions by more than a third by 2040 (compared to 2005)”. This provides a basis for defining agriculture's role in achieving the 2040 target, with a focus on livestock emissions. **CAN Europe calls for a binding and ambitious EU sectoral gross non-CO₂ emission reduction target for agriculture, kept separate from the LULUCF sector, so that real emission cuts are not obscured and offset by temporary land-based carbon sinks accounting.** Without a dedicated sectoral target, agriculture risks becoming a black hole in EU climate governance, with its emissions offset rather than reduced.

Addressing Livestock and Its Emissions

Industrial livestock production is the single largest driver of agricultural emissions in the EU. According to the ESABCC report, livestock directly accounts for 50% of agricultural emissions and emits GHG emissions via two main sources: CH₄ is emitted by enteric fermentation in ruminants (179 Mt CO₂e), and CH₄ and N₂O are released during manure storage and handling of all livestock types (63 Mt CO₂e). Livestock production also contributes to emissions indirectly due to feed production, as approximately two-thirds of EU cereal production and EU agricultural land are used to sustain livestock systems, as the ESABCC stresses. **However, bringing the agriculture sector in line with the climate targets would also reduce dependence on fertilizer (incl. fossil fuel based) and feed imports and therefore has the potential to increase Europe's strategic autonomy in agriculture.**

The ESABCC report highlights several categories of technical approaches to reduce livestock emissions, including improving feed practices, herd management and manure management. These approaches can help to reduce emissions intensity per livestock (alongside addressing animal welfare concerns) and as such should also be supported, but these approaches will not be sufficient to deliver the scale of emission reductions required and in some cases may not even reduce absolute emissions. Ways to reduce the number of overall livestock in a way which supports farmers in pursuing alternative income sources will be critical and should be a core element of the upcoming **livestock strategy to be presented in Q2 by the European Commission**. For example, ESABCC estimates that reducing EU animal product consumption and production by 50% could lower agricultural nitrogen emissions by 40% and GHG emissions by 19–42% compared to 2004 levels.

Specifically, we urge the EU to:

- Develop a **livestock just transition strategy** consistent with an ambitious implementation of the 2040 target, aiming for herd size reductions in areas of intensive production, including support for farmers willing to transition through diversification, agroecological conversion, or buy-out schemes in ecologically sensitive zones.
- **Ensure full and timely implementation of the Nature Restoration Law's peatland provisions:** restoring drained peatlands under agricultural use is essential. Peatland rewetting is one of the highest-impact measures available for agricultural climate action and must not be undermined by weak enforcement.
- **Explore fiscal tools to shift market dynamics:** differentiated VAT rates — lower rates on sustainable products such as organic, plant-based, and locally sourced food, and higher rates on emissions-intensive industrial meat and dairy — can help reorient consumption patterns. Targeted approaches of carbon pricing – as they are also examined in the ESABCC report – can support such market dynamics and raise revenues to contribute to financing the transition. Such measures must be carefully designed to protect lower-income households, ensuring benefits reach consumers rather than being absorbed by retailers.

Improving CAP Reform Proposals for Better Climate Action

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has consistently failed to align public money with climate objectives. CAN Europe views the current CAP as a missed opportunity. The Commission's recent simplification proposals risk further weakening environmental safeguards, including loosening conditionality rules on peatlands and wetlands. This is a step in the wrong direction. The ESABCC also proposes to phase out “CAP payments that incentivise the most greenhouse gas-intensive practices, while exploring alternative income-support mechanisms consistent with climate objectives.”


We call on you to champion the following reforms in CAP review discussions:

- **Establish a dedicated agri-food just transition funding mechanism**, within the CAP or alongside it, to support farmers in adopting sustainable practices, including investment support, advisory services, and capacity building, with special attention to young, small-scale, and new entrant farmers.
- **Phase out harmful subsidies**, including area-based direct payments linked to farm size rather than sustainability outcomes, and support schemes that encourage the production and consumption of low-emission food products.
- **Reform income support** to target those farmers and rural communities most in need of transition support, ensuring fair farm incomes without rewarding environmentally damaging practices.
- **Incentivise and scale up agroecology**: agroecological approaches integrate ecological principles into farming systems, improving soil health, protecting biodiversity, reducing dependence on polluting chemical inputs, and lowering emissions. The CAP must become a driver of this transition, not an obstacle.

We agree that this transition must be just. Millions of farmers and rural workers need this. Voluntary, unaccountable commitments from agri-food corporations have proven insufficient; binding policy frameworks are needed. The EU has the policy tools, the scientific evidence, and the political means to reconcile agriculture with its climate commitments. We call on you to act with the urgency and ambition that the situation demands, and to ensure that the interests of farmers, communities, and future generations are placed at the centre of this transition.

We remain available for further dialogue on these urgent matters.

Yours sincerely,



Chiara Martinelli, Director CAN Europe

