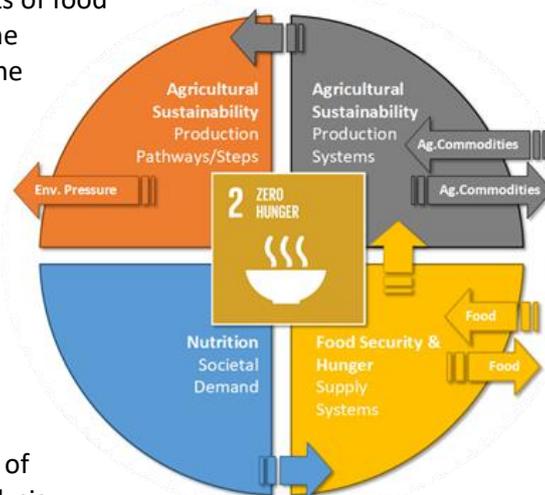


Insights for the EU Farm to Fork Strategy

Shaky foundations for laudable ambition?

Overview

In May 2020, the European Union ratified the Farm to Fork Strategy, which underpins the overall EU Green Deal. As the name implies, the Farm to Fork Strategy focusses on the whole agri-food chain from the production of commodities on farms through processing into food to the health and nutrition aspects of food consumption. As part of the MAGIC project (2016-20) the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal - Zero Hunger, SDG2, was investigated [1]. The research started with a focus on agri-environment production systems and then looked at how supply systems (trade) influences the apparent sustainability of EU agri-food systems. Analysis elsewhere in MAGIC quantified the need for change in societal demand and social practice if the SDG 2 goals are to be achieved. Therefore, the findings from MAGIC can provide evidence to underpin the implementation of the Farm to Fork Strategy.



Debate on Farm-to-Fork

MAGIC is not the only analysis to raise questions regarding the operationalisation of the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy.

Many responses have questioned the ability of the Commission to achieve the targets identified in the Farm to Fork Strategy, particularly the divergence between the environmental ambition within the Farm to Fork Strategy and the decision to delay the adoption of a 'new' Common Agricultural Policy by two years (Agricultural and Rural Convention, 2020). Counter arguments from the agricultural lobby (Copa Cogeca, 2020) stress the lack of impact assessment to look at the trade-offs between environmental targets and impacts on livelihoods. The lack of coherence between the Farm to Fork action plan and 'new' CAP process is also highlighted.

Interestingly, the stakeholder responses do not connect the Farm to Fork Strategy with the wider framing of the sustainability goals implied by EU commitments to the UN Sustainable Development goals. The SDGs make issues of policy coherence more challenging as EU policy makers must now consider not only consequences within, but also, beyond the EU's borders.



Sustainable Foundations for Agri-Food System?

The MAGIC analysis reinforces the conclusion that the EU farming sector "need to do much more" based on mapping pressures on the environment from agricultural production systems for combinations of farm types and FADN regions, see D5.1 p69 onwards ^[1]. The analysis starts to highlight where there are issues, caused by the highest intensities of use, and what the mix of farming systems are associated with that pressure - often livestock and particularly granivore based systems. The analysis also identifies cases where lower intensity production systems - such as cereals - may, because of their spatial extent, exert significant pressure (e.g. GHG emissions or loss of biodiversity). The MAGIC analysis echoes concern on degree to which any intensification of production can safely occur e.g. nutrient losses from fertiliser use still impacting on WFD status. The Farm to Fork Strategy requires the reduced use of pesticides and/or more Integrated Pest Management but the data available are more limited in this regard (see side bar). The analysis also highlights that in many regions of the EU, soil loss from erosion greatly exceeds soil formation (see D5.1 p79). With soil so fundamental to sustainable agricultural production, the Farm to Fork Strategy may need a Soils Directive to match that for Waters. Finally, the MAGIC analysis quantified demand from agricultural systems



for water. This highlighted the farms types placing pressure on rivers and groundwater in southern Europe (blue water). When linked with analysis by Schyns et al. [3] it is striking was that farm systems in northern Europe also often go beyond the limits for the sustainable use of green water (water in soils available for evapotranspiration) even before any consideration is given to climate change (see D5.1 p81).

Improved competitiveness and food security?

The Farm to Fork Strategy highlights the importance of proposed measures in the 'new' CAP to better target income support to those who need it and to those who actively manage land that delivers on the green ambition. Decoupled, particularly area-based, payments (the largest single type, see D5.1 p65) are particularly weakly targeted. This puts considerable pressure on the design of any eligibility and conditionality aspects. Such payments are not an efficient use of taxpayer funds. There are excessive windfall payments for some businesses (see D5.5 p25 [2]) combined with some sectors regularly experiencing negative net margins or with wages so low that they are reliant on seasonal migrant labour often from beyond the EU. Many of the EU's farm businesses are still family firms (in terms of the labour used, see D5.1 p60) and are exposed to weather related risks that few other businesses experience to justify a special case for support. Yet simple stabilisation of the status quo isn't sustainable or desirable either financially or socially (with decreasing numbers of land managers in each generation). The scale of the environmental challenge faced by the EU would seem to require more than can be achieved by the existing resources allocated to the highly competitive agri-environmental schemes

Integrated Pest Management is a toolkit of approaches for the sustainable management of pests that combines biological, cultural and chemical tools to minimise environmental and health risks while being financially feasible.

Farm Accountancy Data Network is a dataset that provides a detailed land management characterisation for a sample of individual farming businesses across the EU. Aggregated data (e.g. by region) is available as time series from 1990. MAGIC analysis exploited biophysical data on intensities of inputs use (e.g. fertilisers) and physical outputs but was limited by energy and pesticides only being included as financial values.

Concluding Discussion

The full report on progress to SDG2 [1] supports the ambition of focussing on the full farm to fork chain, including the need to consider the environmental pressures generated beyond the farm gate. However, the results suggest that there is still a need to improve the sustainability of EU agricultural production as the foundation for a sustainable agri-food system. Linking Farming and Food, more than rhetorically as justification for CAP funds, may mean the need for a more radical reconsideration of how the resources devoted to CAP are used.

Using societal metabolism approaches illustrates that underpinning impact analyses to help operationalise the actions in the Farm to Fork Strategy must include material metrics to ensure a strong sustainability approach, as conventional economic modelling may not take full account of trade-offs in the socio-ecological system.

The ambitions of the F2F Strategy go beyond production systems, seeking to ensure a sustainable food supply to people, including during times of crisis (particularly global events such as Covid-19). This extends the remit of European Union into Food Policy (supply systems and societal demand management). Reducing food waste and obesity are important but hunger and/or food poverty is not acknowledged in the Farm to Fork Strategy yet has highly negative societal impacts in the EU. Connecting these social justice issues illustrates a significant increase in governance complexity, when policy coherence remains difficult to fully implement.

Key sources for further information

More Policy Briefs are available from <https://www.magic-nexus.eu/policy-briefs>

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1. Matthews, K.B., et al., *Report on EU sustainability goals: insights from Quantitative Story Telling and the WEF nexus*. MAGIC (H2020–GA 689669) Project Deliverable 5.1, 31st July 2020. 2020: Online. p. 136.
2. Matthews, K.B., et al., *Report on the Quality Check of the Robustness of the Narrative behind the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)*. in MAGIC (H2020–GA 689669) Project Deliverable 5.5. 2018: Online. p. 65.
3. Schyns, J.F., et al., *Limits to the world's green water resources for food, feed, fiber, timber, and bioenergy*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2019. **116**(11): p. 4893-4898.

