

From Policy to Plate

Are the CAP and Farm to Fork Strategy Delivering for Young People?

Executive Summary

This report examines how the European Union's food policies, specifically the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy, influence young people's ability to access sustainable and affordable food. While these policies aim to support a transition to a more sustainable food system, their implementation presents significant barriers, particularly concerning affordability, availability, and access to reliable information. Our focus on affordability, accessibility, and awareness is based on findings from the WWF Youth Manifesto, *Affordable Sustainable Food at the Heart of Our Future – The Importance of Making Sustainable Food Accessible to Youth*.¹ The manifesto highlights these three key barriers preventing young people from adopting sustainable diets. It emphasises that high prices, limited availability, and a lack of awareness are the primary obstacles to making sustainable food choices.

Starting from these barriers, we highlight how the CAP's subsidy structure is primarily designed to support agricultural producers rather than directly reducing food prices for consumers. As a result, the financial benefits do not necessarily translate into lower costs for sustainable food, leaving young people facing significant affordability barriers. At the same time, we also note that while the F2F Strategy sets ambitious sustainability targets, it lacks concrete mechanisms to address the structural and social barriers that affect food availability. In addition to financial challenges, young people face difficulties in making informed food choices due to inconsistent labeling, the spread of misinformation on social media, and a policy approach that places too much responsibility on the individual rather than ensuring systemic changes. Addressing these issues requires policy adjustments that directly support young consumers in the shift toward sustainable food.

This report focuses on the need for targeted financial incentives, stronger support for local food systems, improved food labeling and educational initiatives, and greater involvement of young people in policy development. A more comprehensive approach is

¹ WWF Youth Team, *Affordable Sustainable Food at the Heart of Our Future – The Importance of Making Sustainable Food Accessible to Youth*, WWF, September 2023. Available at: <https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/youth-manifesto-sept-23.pdf>.

necessary to ensure that sustainable food is not only available but also accessible and affordable for the younger generation.

In Section 2, the report provides background information on the CAP and the F2F Strategy. In Sections 3, 4, and 5 the focus shifts towards the three key barriers preventing young people from adopting sustainable diets: affordability, availability and information and awareness. The report explores the extent to which the CAP and the F2F Strategy act on each barrier with case studies. The report concludes in Section 6 by synthesizing key findings and outlining recommendations for policy adjustments.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 1 |
| 1. Background | 4 |
| 2. Affordability of food: How do CAP and F2F dictate the prices you pay? | 8 |
| 3. Availability of food: Are CAP and F2F hindering food availability for young farmers and consumers? | 11 |
| 4. Information and Awareness: Are the CAP and F2F doing enough to inform young consumers? | 14 |
| Conclusion | 16 |

1. Background

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), established in 1962, is one of the most extensive EU policies, making up about 1/3 of its total budget.² Originally designed to secure food supply post-WWII, the CAP is nowadays set to prioritize fair income, competitiveness, climate action, rural development, and generational renewal among other goals (see figure below).³

Figure 1. CAP's objectives



The CAP's structure is based on two main pillars: supporting agriculture and supporting rural development. The **first pillar** provides direct payments to farmers, aiming at stabilising their income and rewarding eco-friendly practices, as well as market measures to address sudden drops in demand or price fluctuations. The **second pillar** focuses on rural development, with programs tailored to address regional challenges like infrastructure needs, economic development, and environmental conservation. Each

² OECD (2023), Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union, OECD Agriculture and Food Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/32810cf6-en>, p. 6 and p. 35.

³ European Commission. (n.d.-a). Key policy objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027. Retrieved October 27, 2024, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27/key-policy-objectives-cap-2023-27_en.

Member State tailors its national CAP strategic plan to meet EU objectives, analysing specific needs and setting regional targets.⁴

The CAP has recently undergone significant reforms for the 2023-2027 period, with amendments aimed at enhancing sustainability, fairness, and social inclusion. Some of those reforms include:

- **Environmental Measures:** 25% of direct payments should be dedicated to eco-schemes, which are annual financial incentives designed to encourage farmers to adopt environmentally friendly practices on their land. While participation is still voluntary, all EU countries are required to include at least one eco-scheme in their CAP strategies. Additionally, 35% of rural development funds should be dedicated initiatives aiming at addressing climate change and promoting environmental protection.⁵
- **Conditionality and Labour Standards:** Conditionality, formerly known as cross-compliance, refers to a set of rules and standards for public, plant, and animal health and welfare, which farmers are encouraged to comply with.⁶ Farmers must meet stricter environmental and labour standards to receive CAP payments. New conditionality measures require protection of wetland and peatlands (important for absorbing carbon), rotating crops to improve soil health, and preserving natural features on farmland to support biodiversity. By 2025, farmers must also comply with EU labour standards, ensuring better working conditions and safety for farm labourers.⁷
- **Redistributive Income Support:** A minimum of 10% of direct payments should be reallocated to smaller farms in order to enhance fairness. In addition, 3% should be

4

⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. (n.d.). A greener and fairer CAP. Retrieved from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/89b607ec-8a43-4073-bafd-f2493da7699e_en?filename=factsheet-newcap-environment-fairness_en.pdf, pp. 3, 6.

⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, n.d. Conditionality: Linking income support to respect for European Union rules. [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/conditionality_en#:~:text=The%20interplay%20between%20this%20respect,common%20agricultural%20policy%20\(CAP\)%3B](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/conditionality_en#:~:text=The%20interplay%20between%20this%20respect,common%20agricultural%20policy%20(CAP)%3B)

⁷ OECD (2023), Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union, OECD Agriculture and Food Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/32810cf6-en>, p. 181.

dedicated to helping young farmers enter the field, focusing on land access and investment incentives.⁸

- **Reduction and Capping of Direct Payments:** Member States can reduce payments by up to 85% for amounts exceeding €60,000, with an optional cap of €100,000. Savings from these reductions remain in national CAP budgets, allowing funds to support redistributive payments. The reduction and capping measures remain voluntary.⁹

Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F)

Launched in May 2020, the **Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy**¹⁰ is the EU's roadmap for transitioning to a sustainable food system. As a key foundation of the European Green Deal, the F2F provides a strategic framework for reducing the food system's environmental impact while ensuring fair economic and social conditions. Unlike the CAP, F2F is **not a policy but a strategy**, meaning it sets goals and legislative proposals but does not directly fund agricultural activities or create legally binding rules.

The strategy is built around four core objectives:

1. **Sustainable Food Production:** Reducing reliance on pesticides and fertilizers while promoting organic farming.
2. **Sustainable Food Processing and Distribution:** Encouraging transparency and sustainability in food supply chains.
3. **Sustainable Food Consumption:** Improving food labeling and consumer awareness to drive healthier, more sustainable choices.

⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. (n.d.). A greener and fairer CAP. Retrieved from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/89b607ec-8a43-4073-bafd-f2493da7699e_en?filename=factsheet-newcap-environment-fairness_en.pdf, p. 8.

⁹ OECD (2023), Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union, OECD Agriculture and Food Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/32810cf6-en>, p. 197.

¹⁰ 'A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system' (COM/2020/381).

4. **Food Loss and Waste Prevention:** Cutting food waste at every stage of the supply chain.^{11,12}

The F2F Strategy reflects the EU's commitment to climate neutrality by 2050, however its success depends on whether targets are integrated into binding legislation. Critics argue that voluntary commitments and reliance on consumer-driven change may not be enough to achieve meaningful transformation,¹³ raising concerns about the pace and enforceability of the strategy.

CAP + F2F: Are CAP and F2F living up to the expectations?

While the CAP and F2F were both designed to tackle the interconnected challenges of the EU food system, their implementation has encountered significant obstacles. A key component of the European Green Deal, the F2F Strategy recognized the fragmented nature of EU food and farming policies, which have perpetuated unsustainable practices. To address these practices, the strategy aimed to create a comprehensive action plan for integrated food governance across the EU.

However, many crucial elements of this plan have faltered under intense lobbying and opposition. Plans intended to regulate excessive pesticide use have been shelved, a thorough revision of outdated animal welfare legislation remains unaddressed, and an overarching framework law for sustainable food systems—designed to tackle disconnected policy—has yet to be realized.¹⁴

While the CAP and F2F aim to promote sustainability, their effectiveness has been undermined by insufficient implementation and external influences. For meaningful change, the EU must then prioritize these initiatives and follow through with decisive actions.

¹¹ European Commission. (2020). A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system. COM(2020) 381 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381>, pp. 8-9 [12, 16].

¹² European Commission. (2020). Farm to Fork Strategy - Publication. https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en [8].

¹³ European Environmental Bureau. (2020). *EEB consultation response to Farm to Fork strategy*. Retrieved from https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EEB-consultation-response-to-Farm-to-Fork_2020pdf.pdf.

¹⁴ META. (n.d.). Today's rotten food systems, a misguided CAP and the road out of crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.meta.eu/2024/05/todays-rotten-food-systems-a-misguided-cap-and-the-road-out-of-crisis/>.

2. Affordability of food: How do CAP and F2F dictate the prices you pay?

The general idea behind CAP is that subsidies keep prices artificially low (below that naturally assigned by the market). The extent of the follow-through effect of subsidies to consumer price is context based. The impact of the CAP on the price paid in Brussels will differ to Paris, but equally Brussels will differ to Leuven. From local supply chains to contractual agreements and domestic policies, a multitude of factors influence the extent of this follow-through effect. Ultimately, the extent of follow-through is a culmination of three broad factors:

a. The Subsidy's Value

The CAP's share of the EU budget has been declining since the 1980s, whereby the then European Economic Community assigned 66% of its budget. Today's 2023-2027 CAP is financed by just over one-third of the EU budget, down slightly from the previous programme. This translates to a total budget of €307 billion, of which €264bn derive from EU funds, and €42bn from national funding. This gives an idea of the CAP's scale. In general, the larger the pot, the lower the price burden borne by the consumer.^{15,16}

b. Subsidy Target

The CAP budget itself is assigned in two pillars: direct payments and rural development. **Direct payments** comprise roughly 72% of the budget¹⁷ and come in two types: coupled payments, which support the production of specific products, and decoupled payments, which are not tied to any particular product. Currently, most CAP direct payments are decoupled, providing essential income for farmers.¹⁸ However, since these payments are not linked to production and do not address household income, they can impede

¹⁵ [OECD] OECD. (2023). Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union, OECD Agriculture and Food Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/32810cf6-en>.

¹⁶ [IFOAM Organics Europe] Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) - IFOAM Organics Europe.

¹⁷ European Parliament, 2023, Fact Sheets on the European Union: Direct Payments. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/109/first-pillar-of-the-common-agricultural-policy-cap-ii-direct-payments-to-farmers>.

¹⁸ [European Commission] Coupled income support - European Commission. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/income-support/additional-schemes/coupled-income-support_en.

structural and generational changes within the farming sector. Consequently, the CAP largely does not affect the prices of specific products. Generally, countries are limited to allocating no more than 13% of direct payments to coupled income support (CIS), with a single exception allowing an additional 2% for protein crops.¹⁹ The two largest routes for decoupled payments are basic income support for sustainability (BISS), and eco-schemes, with 51%, and 25% of the direct payment budget respectively. BISS are payments granted per eligible hectare conditional on certain agri-environmental requirements, known as *conditionality*. Eco-schemes are one of the most significant additions to this programme of the CAP and allow member states to individually assign CAP funds to agri-environmental areas they believe require action.

The second pillar, **rural development**, targets broader agri-climate, and rural maintenance measures, which are non-specific to member states. For example, investment in organic farming which is forecasted to cover 5% of agricultural spending across the 2023-2027 CAP (IFOAM Organics Europe).²⁰

In sum, every product in the market is likely subject to a large combination of subsidy injections that will likely differentiate it in the supermarket from a bordering product, and will certainly differentiate it from the product on the next aisle. This may influence food consumption choices, which is especially visible amongst young people when it boils down to product sustainability and ethics.

The schemes introduced by the CAP do not appear sufficient to bridge the price gap between sustainable and conventional goods. This gap remains significant enough to make sustainable options less accessible for many consumers. One possible explanation is that subsidies intended to support sustainable production are not fully passed down the supply chain to the consumer. Instead, the value of the subsidy is likely distributed across different stages—from farmers aiming to maintain their income, to intermediaries and retailers who may apply mark-ups to sustainable products. For example, in the case of

¹⁹ European Commission. N.d. Coupled income support. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/additional-schemes/coupled-income-support_en.

²⁰ IFOAM Organics Europe. (n.d.). Support for organic farming remains relatively limited compared to the overall CAP budget. Investments in organic farming (conversion and maintenance) account for around 1.5% of current EU agricultural spending, and is forecast to account for 5% for the 2023-2027 period. Retrieved from <https://www.ifoam-eu.org/policy/cap-and-rural-development/>.

organic produce, even if a farmer receives a subsidy per unit, it is unlikely that the full amount is reflected in a lower retail price for consumers.²¹

This, coupled with potential over-subsidisation for conventional practices, poses a significant barrier for youth to eat sustainably within their financial constraints. With these factors in mind, it can be said that the CAP influences prices and therefore impacts young consumers in their choices of food. Price, more than any other generation, influences decision-making for youth, making the CAP's impact on their choices particularly pronounced.

How F2F interacts with pricing?

The EU's Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy aims to make Europe's food system more sustainable. While the strategy champions environmentally-friendly practices, it doesn't directly tackle affordability, particularly for youth who may already struggle with limited budgets. As sustainable practices like organic farming, reduced pesticide usage, and ethical animal husbandry become more common, production costs rise, which often translates into higher consumer prices. For young people, who are generally at the beginning of their careers or in education, these increased prices could present significant barriers to accessing sustainable food options, limiting their ability to participate fully in the shift towards sustainability.

The F2F strategy acknowledges the role of pricing instruments—such as taxes, subsidies, and VAT adjustments—in making sustainable food more affordable while ensuring that food prices reflect their true environmental and social costs.²² However, despite recognizing that tax systems should account for pollution, GHG emissions, and resource use, the EU has made little progress in integrating fiscal tools into its food policies. The CAP and F2F strategy offer no direct fiscal policy support, and agriculture remains outside the EU's carbon pricing system. This absence of financial incentives and disincentives is a major gap, as research suggests that pricing mechanisms are essential

²¹ OECD. (2023). Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union. OECD Agriculture and Food Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/32810cf6-en> [1, 2].

²² European Environment Agency. (2022). *Transforming Europe's policy mix: Achieving sustainability goals through integrated approaches* (TH-AL-22-013-EN-N). Publications Office of the European Union. https://www.puntosicuro.it/_resources/files/Transforming%20Europe_s%20policy%20mix%20TH-AL-22-013-EN-N.pdf.

for accelerating the transition to sustainable food systems.²³ While the F2F strategy encourages national governments to adjust VAT rates—lowering them for fruits, vegetables, and other sustainable products while increasing them for ultra-processed foods—such measures remain voluntary.

Addressing this gap requires targeted financial support for young consumers. Initiatives such as price reductions on sustainable food products, vouchers for eco-friendly purchases, or youth-specific subsidies could make sustainable diets more financially viable. Additionally, community-based models like Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) offer alternative solutions by connecting consumers directly with local producers, reducing costs while fostering stronger ties between young people and sustainable food systems. Without such mechanisms, the affordability challenge will continue to hinder the transition to more sustainable diets for youth.

3. Availability of food: Are CAP and F2F hindering food availability for young farmers and consumers?

Food availability is a complex and multi-faceted concept and dimension connected to the process of food systems and sustainability. According to FAO (2006), food availability represents the consistent, secure, safe and sufficient supply of food through household production, other outputs, imports or food assistance, to all individuals within a country.²⁴ Additionally, food availability is defined as a part of the food environment which affects food purchasing and eating choices for consumers, and is highly dependent on external drivers (climate change, globalization, income growth, etc.) and food supply chains.

It is argued that several aspects of the **CAP framework** restrict youth's access to food availability, particularly in terms of their involvement in the agricultural sector and their ability to contribute to and benefit from food production.²⁵ These restrictions stem from

²³ Springmann, M., Freund, F., & Mason-D'Croz, D. (2020). *Options for reforming agricultural subsidies from health, climate, and economic perspectives*. *Nature Food*, 1(7), 448-454. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-020-0110-5>.

²⁴ FAO. June 2006. * Food Security* Published by FAO's Agriculture and Development Economics Division (ESA) https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/faoitally/documents/pdf/pdf_Food_Security_Concept_Note.pdf.

²⁵ May, D. et al. 2020. *Preventing young farmers from leaving the farm: Investigating the effectiveness of the young farmer payment using a behavioural approach*.* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264837719314036>; ECA. 2017. *EU Support to Young Farmers Should Be Better Targeted to Foster Effective Generational Renewal. Special

structural and policy challenges that create barriers for young people entering farming, reducing their potential impact on food availability. Some studies suppose that CAP's direct and indirect support results as insufficient and may be considered as 'secondary problem solution'²⁶ because youth face barriers beyond in-farm financial insecurities and skills gaps. For instance, they highlight limited land access and ownership due to increasing high land prices caused by other CAP measures, complex bureaucracy, compliance costs and perceptions of agriculture, to name a few. Among others, a study on CAP's support to Lithuanian young farmers points out that a more inclusive platform is needed, which encourages small farmers' participation, who are normally less supported than larger farm owners. The findings also point at the fact that agricultural advisory services should also be tailored to improve awareness of environmental and resilient food systems.²⁷

Sustainable food availability significantly impacts consumer choices, as a complex mix of social, economic, and environmental factors creates feedback loops that affect food accessibility and affordability. Lower-income households often opt for cheaper, processed foods that are calorie-dense but low in nutrients. This widespread consumption of less nutritious options can drive down demand for fresh, healthier foods, which then become more expensive and less available in the community. Limited transportation access to healthier options, and centralized availability in supermarkets and discount stores further intensifies this cycle. For instance, a study found that the main drivers for shaping beef consumption behaviour across Europe are economics and marketing, food attributes, personal factors and the CAP policy measures. Meaning that

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http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/external-studies/2015/young-farmers/final-report-1_en.pdf;
Hamilton, W. et al. 2015. *Entrepreneurial younger farmers and the "younger farmer problem" in England*. Quoted by May, D. et al.; Zodang, M.J, et al. 2015. * Needs of young farmers. Report I of the Pilot project: Exchange programmes for young farmers*.
https://www.reseauwallonpac.be/sites/default/files/final-report-1_en_0.pdf.

²⁶ IFOAM Organics Europe. (2021). *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) - IFOAM Organics Europe* [Source 5].

²⁷ The study "Young farmers' support under the Common Agriculture Policy and sustainability of rural regions: Evidence from Lithuania" analyzes the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support system on the sustainability of rural regions in Lithuania, focusing on young farmers' perceptions. It finds out that CAP support primarily boosts income without significantly affecting investments, particularly for crop farms. Although there is low environmental awareness, there is a notable demand for advisory services on business planning, highlighting gaps in business and marketing skills among young farmers.

apart from price, health, quality, preferences and habits, the CAP regulations, subsidies, trading contracts and labelling are factors affecting availability.²⁸

In addition to the CAP, the **Farm to Fork Strategy** (F2F) puts emphasis on technology and innovation to increase the availability of food but does not sufficiently take into account the wider social and structural aspects that are needed for a food system change, i.e. regional collaboration, to make it available to young people.²⁹ While the F2F lays out 31 policy actions that are meant to transform our current food system into a sustainable one, it does not specify which specific social and structural aspects need to be addressed in order to make this possible.

Although improvable in these aspects, the F2F strategy targets broad policy areas such as health, education, and market and institutional structuration. Particularly relevant to youth are the foreseen actions on increasing food availability through nutrition labeling and profiles, educating younger generations in schools, and shortening supply chains. For example, the European Commission proposes setting minimum requirements for sustainable food procurement in schools and hospitals, meaning they would need to source a certain amount of food meeting specific criteria, such as organic certification or local sourcing.³⁰ The same applies to the harmonization of labels for sustainability. Moreover, the European Economic Social Committee has suggested creating new Sustainable Dietary Guidelines that respect cultural and geographical differences across and within EU Member States.³¹ These guidelines could give clearer direction to farms, food processors, retailers, and the catering industry. With such a framework, the agri-food system could produce, process, distribute, and sell healthier and more sustainable food at fairer prices. However, compulsory guidelines for sustainable food

²⁸ De, A., Gorton, M., Čechura, L., Bogason, S. G., Brimon, L., Odene, J., & Schamari, D. (2021). *Food consumption behaviours in Europe. Mapping drivers, trends and pathways towards sustainability*.

<https://valumics.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Valumics-Report-1- Mapping-Behaviours.pdf>.

²⁹ Moschitz, H., Muller, A., Kretzschmar, U., Haller, L., de Porras, M., Pfeifer, C., Stolz, H. (2021). How can the farm to fork strategy deliver on its organic promises? Some critical reflections. *EuroChoices*, 20(1), 30–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1746-692x.12294>.

³⁰ European Commission. (2020). *Farm to Fork Strategy - European Commission*. Retrieved from https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf.

³¹ European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). (2023). *Promoting Healthy and Sustainable Diets in the EU - Own Initiative Opinion*. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/promoting-health-y-and-sustainable-diets-eu-own-initiative-opinion>.

procurement have not been set yet. The necessity for addressing these broader structural changes also derives from previous attempts to improve young people's access to healthy food, an example of which is the EU School Fruit, Vegetables, and Milk Scheme (2010-2021), aimed at shaping eating habits and supporting the transition to sustainable food systems. While the scheme included educational measures, its overall impact on influencing children's long-term food choices was limited.³²

At the same time, while the F2F strategy promotes a shift toward sustainable food systems—including an emphasis on plant-based proteins—this is likely to occur unevenly across different regions and sectors. This could mean that young people in certain areas face greater challenges of food availability. In regions with a strong tradition of conventional agriculture, young people might face challenges in accessing alternative protein sources. It is therefore not sufficient to simply produce a bigger quantity of sustainable food but we also need to consider how they are distributed and processed so that they are available to young people.

Overall, the F2F strategy outlines ambitious policy actions for making sustainable food accessible to young people. However, these remain too broad and need further specification and clear timelines for implementation.

4. Information and Awareness: Are the CAP and F2F doing enough to inform young consumers?

Young people often lack clear, reliable information about sustainable diets and food systems. Myths and misinformation continue to hinder progress, making it difficult for consumers to shift toward sustainable choices. The Farm to Fork Strategy aimed to address this issue by creating a sustainability labeling framework by 2024.³³ However, as of January 2025, the Commission had still not introduced such a framework. In addition,

³² European Union. (2022). Evaluation support study of the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme. Retrieved from <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3d2ec389-6a31-11ed-b14f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

³³ European Commission. (2020). *COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system*. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381>; European Commission. (2020). https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf.

this approach leans heavily on the assumption that providing information alone will drive change. We remain skeptical of this approach, as we note that a number of factors influence food choices, such as habits, price, convenience, and social influences.

In the national CAP Strategic Plans (2023–27), some Member States explicitly acknowledge the importance of improving consumer awareness of sustainable, healthy, and balanced diets as part of their interventions.³⁴ However, its primary focus remains on subsidies and production incentives, not on ensuring that young people receive clear, actionable guidance about sustainable food. The CAP's budget allocations suggest a continued prioritization of industrial-scale farming, while small, sustainable producers—who could benefit most from consumer awareness—often struggle to compete.

Meanwhile, the available food labels remain inconsistent and confusing. The widely used Nutri-Score system, for example, fails to distinguish between white and whole grain bread, undermining trust in its claims.³⁵ In turn, a 2024 Commission report identified 200 sustainability labels used in the EU food sector, but no member state has an overview of all these different food labels, making it impossible to monitor and assess the veracity of their claims.³⁶ While front-of-pack labeling can improve transparency, its effectiveness is highly dependent on consumer motivation and ability to interpret the information. Simply introducing more labels will not be enough if they are poorly designed, contradictory, or easily manipulated by industry interests.

Social media misinformation further complicates the issue, with 67% of young people turning to platforms like TikTok and Instagram for food advice,³⁷ where many may encounter conflicting and misleading claims. Yet, EU policies place little emphasis on countering food-related disinformation, relying instead on voluntary industry initiatives and scattered educational campaigns.

³⁴ European Commission. (n.d.). *Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027: National Strategic Plans*. Retrieved from https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvhdscs8bjza_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vm8fi1trmdtx.

³⁵ Egnell, M. et al. (2020). *Objective Understanding of Front-of-Package Nutrition Labels: An International Comparative Experimental Study across 12 Countries*. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7284849/>.

³⁶ European Court of Auditors, 2024, Special report: Food labelling in the EU: Consumers can get lost in the maze of labels. https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2024-23/SR-2024-23_EN.pdf.

³⁷ EIT Food, July 2021. Our food, our food system. https://www.eitfood.eu/media/news-pdf/Our_Food,_Our_Food_System_-_EIT_Food_report_.pdf.

Perhaps the biggest flaw in EU food policies is their reliance on 'consumer responsabilisation'—the idea that individuals should drive change through their purchasing power. By focusing on consumer choice rather than holding corporations and policymakers accountable, CAP and F2F risk shifting the burden onto young people while allowing the industrial food system to continue business as usual. Real change requires policies that go beyond informing consumers to actively shaping the food environment—through stricter regulations on unsustainable production, better support for small-scale sustainable farmers, and clear, enforceable transparency measures for food labeling.

If the EU truly wants to create a fair and sustainable food system, it must move beyond simply educating consumers and instead take bold steps to regulate and transform the industry itself. Without this shift, awareness alone will remain an insufficient tool in the fight for food system sustainability.

Conclusion

This report highlights the complex interplay between EU policies and young people's access to sustainable and affordable food, revealing both opportunities and challenges within the current framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy. While both policies aim to foster a more sustainable food system, their current implementation falls short of adequately addressing the specific needs and circumstances of young people. The analysis shows that significant barriers persist, primarily related to affordability, availability, and information, which prevent young people from fully participating in the transition to sustainable food consumption.

The report emphasizes that affordability remains a barrier, as healthy, local food is often too expensive. CAP subsidies should be redirected to small and mid-sized farms to lower costs, while F2F should introduce financial incentives like vouchers to make sustainable food more accessible. Food availability is also hindered by bureaucracy, land prices, and industrial supply chains. CAP must support young farmers and regional food networks, while F2F should address distribution issues, not just production.

Meanwhile, consumer awareness efforts excessively rely on individual responsibility, despite confusing food labels and widespread misinformation. The EU must standardize sustainability labels, regulate misleading marketing, and counter disinformation instead of leaving young people to figure it out alone.

Ultimately, ensuring that young people have access to affordable, available, and sustainable food requires a coherent and integrated approach that bridges gaps between agricultural policies (CAP) and food system transformation strategies (F2F). While both frameworks play crucial roles in shaping the European food landscape, their insufficient synergy limits their effectiveness in addressing the challenges young farmers and consumers face. Without stronger policy coherence and bolder structural changes, the EU risks leaving young consumers and farmers behind in the transition to a sustainable food system. By making food more affordable, available, and accessible through coordinated CAP-F2F actions, the EU can ensure that future generations have the resources, knowledge, and opportunities to shape a resilient and fair food system.