

Nurturing better nutrition through networking

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of personal health for the entire world. Networking and sharing knowhow about how agricultural policy can support both supply and demand for nutritious food offers useful opportunities to help protect EU citizens' resilience.

Nutrition is a topical issue for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and the regulation governing [CAP Strategic Plans \(CSPs\)](#) states prominently that the CAP should keep ensuring access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food at all times. Furthermore, it should help to improve the response of EU agriculture to new societal demands on food and health, including healthier nutrition. [Farm to Fork Strategy figures](#) confirm that over half of the EU adult population is overweight. This contributes to a high prevalence of diet-related diseases and associated healthcare costs, including higher fatalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Farm to Fork Strategy underlines why we need better nutrition and healthier diets to help us protect ourselves from health crises like COVID-19. Overall, European diets are not in line with national dietary recommendations, and the EU's 'food environment' does not ensure that the healthy option is always the easiest one. Farm to Fork also notes that if European diets were in line with dietary recommendations, the environmental footprint of EU food systems could be significantly reduced (through more [plant-based diets](#) that can help create fewer emissions from less livestock and capture more carbon from increased fruit and vegetable production).



Supply and demand policy solutions

The CAP is safeguarding food security and is helping [protect supplies of our fresh food](#) which, in its raw form when it leaves the farm gate, normally possesses healthy and nutritious properties. Society's nutritional challenges are not therefore often supply-side related, and poor nutrition (with its resultant health risks) remains more generally a demand-side issue linked to consumption (e.g. excessive intake of fats, sugars and salts as well as affordability of healthy diets). We as consumers make choices about the food we eat based on our personal preferences and purchasing power. Hence, the CAP helps to provide us with the raw materials for our food products, but if we choose

to consume unhealthy food, or cannot afford alternatives, then this is a demand-side challenge for policies focused more on food consumption, rather than food production. 'Food and Health' is thus only one of the ten [CAP key objectives](#). A sound understanding of the difference between supply and demand policy solutions can help Member States make effective use of the opportunities offered by the CAP.



Supply-side policy approaches promoting nutritional food are possible and exist. Production incentives and support include the CAP's [school fruit scheme](#) and the wider [common market organisation regulation's](#) policy toolkit covering public interventions and storage options. These help to provide valuable production incentives for securing supplies of [fresh fruit, vegetables](#)



and other foods. Policy interventions targeting [nutrition-sensitive food value chains](#) are another tool that can encourage [Producer Organisations](#) or food processors to invest within a framework of nutrition knowhow during decisions about the food supplies they provide. [CSP interventions](#) (e.g. those supporting investments in food processing facilities, cooperation, or knowledge exchange as well as coupled income support and sectoral interventions) can all also play positive roles in providing secure supplies of nutritious food with the aim to improve quality and sustainability. If nutrition was to be considered important enough to be classified in the future as a public good, this then could also result in its supply receiving protection as other public goods do.

Food processing is a policy arena where much impact can be achieved to improve the nutritional value of the food we purchase. [Demand-side policy tools](#) include the Farm to Fork's [Code of Good Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices](#) which advocates for nutritional-sensitive decision-making throughout the food sector. Proposals for harmonised mandatory [front-of-pack nutrition labelling](#) to enable consumers to make health-conscious food choices are another anticipated policy innovation from the Farm to Fork strategy with influence on demand-side factors.



Stakeholder action

A combination of agri-food policy measures incentivising both agricultural production and consumer consumption of low-fat, plant-based diets will ultimately be required to address society's current trends favouring unhealthy food. The consequences of such trends have been exposed by COVID-19 and policy makers can take advantage of society's new-found awareness about the importance of staying healthy.

Producers, processors, and marketers can profit from expanding their provision and promotion of nutritional food supplies. Knowledge networking on this topic can also make considerable contributions. CAP outreach channels including

national rural networks, Local Action Groups, EIP Operational Groups, and farm advisory services can therefore all play useful roles helping to promote practical on-the-ground actions nurturing better nutrition for EU citizens.

