



The European Commission presents options for simplification to reduce the burden for EU farmers

Brussels, 22 February 2024

Today, the European Commission sent a paper to the Belgian Presidency outlining first possible actions to help reduce the administrative burden weighing on farmers' shoulders. The document, which will be discussed with Member States in the [agricultural Council of 26 February](#), lists a range of short- and mid-term actions that can be taken to achieve simplification. This will serve as the basis for discussions and joint action with EU countries.

The actions listed in the paper take into account the contributions by national administrations, major EU farming organisations and the European Parliament's agricultural committee. The simplification paper delivers on [President von der Leyen's commitment](#) made at the European Council on 1 February 2024.

The delivery model of the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), based on CAP Strategic Plans decided and implemented at national level, already represents a step forward in terms of simplification and subsidiarity compared with the previous period. Member States play a key role in keeping the administrative burden for farmers limited and proportionate to achieve the objectives of EU legislation. This is why any successful simplification exercise must be carried out in close cooperation with the national administrations and farmers themselves.

In light of this, **the Commission will launch in March an online survey directly addressed to farmers. This targeted consultation will help to identify their main sources of concern, and understand the sources of administrative burden and complexity** stemming from CAP rules as well as other EU rules for food and agriculture in the EU, and their application at national level. This survey will provide already by the summer a clearer picture of the main administrative obstacles perceived and faced by farmers. Its results will be included in a more detailed analysis to be published in Autumn 2024.

Beyond this necessary gathering of evidence, the **Commission proposes short and mid-term measures that could bring some relief to both farmers but also to national administrations**, which represent the first point of contact for farmers and are responsible for managing and paying EU funds.

First, **the Commission proposes to simplify some of the conditionality requirements with which EU farmers need to comply**. The set of basic standards- referred to as GAECs (good agricultural and environmental conditions)- that all farmers must comply with to receive their CAP support has proven challenging to implement in certain circumstances.

The Commission has already acted by granting for 2024 a [partial exemption on rules on land lying fallow](#), the so-called GAEC 8. **The Commission now proposes to change the rules on the first standard (GAEC 1), which imposes a requirement to keep areas of permanent grassland in the EU stable since reference year 2018**. Under this requirement, former livestock farmers with large grassland forced to shift to arable crops production because of market disturbances in the meat and dairy sector could be asked to reconvert their arable land into permanent grassland. This obligation could lead to loss of income for the farmers concerned. **The Commission proposes to amend these rules by mid-March to ensure that structural changes caused by market reorientation and reduction in livestock are taken into account, ensuring that farmers are not penalised in their work, and helping to** reduce burden since fewer areas would have to be reconverted into permanent grassland.

The Commission will also review which agricultural practices may be possible during sensitive periods when fulfilling the obligation to cover soils under GAEC 6. The Commission is also encouraging all stakeholders to share their view on the administrative burden that may be linked to the Nitrates Directive. This can be done via the online public consultation open until 8 March 2024.

Second, **the Commission proposes to simplify the methodology for certain checks, aiming to reduce the number of on-farm visits by national administrations by up to 50%**. This measure

directly responds to requests from Member States. The Commission proposes to streamline and clarify how to assess the quality of the [Area Monitoring System](#). The latter is a system based on automated analysis of satellite imagery from Copernicus, meant to reduce inspections on farms, help farmers to avoid errors and incur penalties, as well as facilitate reporting. With fewer visits from the administration to manage, farmers will have more time to dedicate to their core work.

Third, **the Commission proposes to clarify the use of the concept of force majeure and exceptional circumstances.** This legal concept permits that farmers who cannot fulfil all their CAP requirements due to exceptional and unforeseeable events outside their control (such as in cases of severe droughts or floods) do not have penalties imposed on them. This clarification will support national administrations in the application of this provision and ensure its uniform application across the Union. This will also improve the certainty of getting CAP support for farmers impacted by such unfortunate events. More generally, the Commission will work with Member States to determine possible ways of rationalising controls.

In its paper, the Commission also mentions additional mid-term measures that may ease burdens for farmers, especially smaller farmers, and may consider proposing changes to that effect to the CAP basic Regulations agreed upon by the European Parliament and the Council in 2021.

One proposal put forward may be to exempt small farms of under 10 hectares from controls related to compliance with conditionality requirements (GAECs). This exemption would significantly simplify the daily work of small farmers who represent 65% of CAP beneficiaries, while maintaining the CAP's environmental ambitions since small farms cover only 9,6% of the areas receiving CAP support. Additionally, should the basic Regulations be changed in the mid-term, GAEC 8 on land lying fallow, GAEC 7 on crop rotation and GAEC 6 on soil cover could be reviewed to further reduce burden for farmers.

In parallel, the Commission will facilitate the exchange of best simplification practices by Member States across the different relevant bodies of cooperation (i.e., expert groups, committees and others).

When considering simplification proposals, the Commission took into account the effects of these proposals on the environmental objectives and ambition of the Common Agricultural Policy. They also ensure the continuation of a stable and predictable legislative framework for EU farmers, based on the [current CAP that entered into force on 1 January 2023](#). To further respond to the current crisis situation in the agricultural sector, the Commission is also working on actions to improve the position of farmers in the food chain and protect them against unfair trading practices, which will be presented shortly. Given that farmers are often the most vulnerable link in the food value chain, these actions may cover issues such as market transparency, trading practices in the value chain, costs of production, or more homogeneous control of existing rules on imported agricultural products.

European Commission President Ursula **von der Leyen** said:

"The Commission remains fully committed to delivering solutions to ease the pressure currently felt by our hard-working farming women and men. We are easing the administrative burden on our farmers to help them guarantee food security for European citizens. Simplification of our agriculture policies is a constant priority, at both EU and national level. With this range of actions, we are delivering on the pledge we made to our farmers to accelerate this discussion. I look forward to hearing the views of our Member States."

Example of short-term measures presented for discussions to Member States

Measure	Impact	Timeline
Changing rules of the calculation of permanent grassland to cater for cases of structural changes in farming	Farmers with reduced livestock will not have to reconvert arable areas to pasture	Delegated act to be adopted in March

Reviewing possible agricultural practices to cover soils	Farmers can have more flexibility in how they fulfil this conditionality	Clarification to be presented and discussed with Member States in March
Revising the EU methodology to assess the quality of the Area Monitoring System	Farmers will receive up to 50% fewer on-farm visits; this will also free up resources in national administrations	Finalisation and presentation of the new methodology in March
Clarifying the concept of force majeure	Impacted farmers will have more certainty regarding the receipt of their CAP payments and national administrations will benefit from a clearer interpretation at EU level, preventing budgetary errors	Presentation of the clarification to Member States in March
Facilitating exchanges of best practices and amendments to CAP Strategic Plans	National administrations can identify with more ease areas of possible simplification and implement them faster to the benefit of farmers	Ongoing process

Identifying the main administrative burden weighing on farmers

Online public consultation on the evaluation of the Nitrates Directive	Open until 8 March 2024
EU online survey for farmers	From March to May with results expected at the beginning of Summer 2024
Detailed analysis of the complexity for farmers stemming from the EU regulatory framework and national rules	Results expected in Autumn 2024

For More Information

[European farmers exempted from rules on land lying fallow](#)

IP/24/1002

Quotes:

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Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission - 22/02/2024

"The message from farmers is clear: they want to be working in their fields, not stuck behind files. In response, the Commission has identified a range of EU-level actions that could help to ease the administrative burden on farmers over the coming months and years. I welcome this renewed acceleration towards simplification and I commit to working with Member States and stakeholders on these actions and every initiative that will enable farmers to spend their working hours on what matters – supporting their families and producing our essential goods."

Janusz Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture - 22/02/2024

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