

# Young farmers' vision for the future of livestock

Position paper | June 2026



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## Introduction

CEJA's position paper on livestock aims to outline the strategic role of livestock in the EU and present actionable recommendations for ensuring its sustainability and attractiveness to young farmers. Young farmers welcome the European Union's ambition to develop a more strategic approach to livestock. Livestock farming is an essential component of European agriculture and rural life, playing a central role in food security, circularity, biodiversity and the resilience of the agri-food system.

**Any future EU vision for livestock must reflect the sector's complexity and diversity.** This position reflects a comprehensive perspective on livestock farming across the European Union, encompassing all animal sectors and production systems. It recognises the diversity of species, farming models, and regional conditions, and underlines the need to support all livestock sectors fairly and coherently. Livestock farming encompasses a wide range of species, production systems, territories and value chains, with significant differences in economic, environmental and social conditions. Policy choices therefore involve trade-offs between economic viability, environmental performance, animal health, animal welfare and societal expectations, requiring balanced, science-based and workable solutions rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

**For young farmers, the future of livestock farming depends on whether the sector remains attractive and viable for the next generation.** High investment costs, volatile margins, labour shortages, administrative burdens and uncertainty about future policy directions continue to undermine generational renewal. At the same time, livestock farmers are exposed to market volatility, animal diseases and an uneven distribution of value within the food chain.

Ensuring the long-term viability of the sector requires a coherent policy framework that strengthens investment capacity, improves the functioning of the value chain, enhances risk management tools and provides clear and predictable signals for the future of livestock farming in Europe.

## PART 1: ACKNOWLEDGING THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF LIVESTOCK

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Despite the challenges it faces, the European livestock sector remains one of our most precious assets in our pathway to more resource-efficient, resilient, and sustainable agriculture. Operating under some of the world's highest animal welfare, environmental and food safety standards, EU livestock systems are among the most sustainable globally in terms of regulatory compliance, production efficiency and continuous improvement efforts while providing positive externalities such as:

### *Environment and ecosystems*

- **Fertilisation and nutrient recovery** – With manure and slurry, which have good values of mineral nitrogen and total nitrogen. Also, the digestate, a by-product of biogas production, can be used as an important soil improver and a source of nitrogen, helping to reduce the need for chemical fertilisers;
- **Maintenance of grasslands** – Livestock is essential for the preservation of grasslands, which are often unusable for arable production and are, at the same time, natural carbon sinks through their carbon sequestration capacity;
- **Soil restoration and nutrient cycling** – Livestock enhances organic matter content and improves nutrient cycling in grassland-based systems, with the use of manure and slurry. Ruminants are the engines of circularity in agricultural systems, powering the rapid transformation of feed back into plant-available nutrients, contributing to nutrient cycling and upcycling inedible proteins into food products for human consumption;
- **Intercrops management and valorisation by ruminants before the next sowing** – For example, cows eat some meslin intercrops and give back manure, which will fertilise the next crop and increase organic matter in the soil;
- **Water quantity** – Increasing the organic matter in the soil positively impacts soil structure and its infiltration capacity, preventing soil erosion and run-off. Enhanced water retention can help mitigate floods and decrease soil erosion during heavy rainfall;
- **Water quality** – Agriculture works within the natural water cycle, as grasslands act as a water filter thanks to a higher number of microorganisms present in their soil;
- **Climate mitigation** – Livestock can contribute to climate mitigation through carbon sequestration in grazing systems, particularly through the preservation and active management of permanent grasslands, which act as significant carbon sinks, as well as renewable energy use and improved waste management, and by reducing the need for synthetic fertilisers, which are typically gas-derived and highly emission-intensive;
- **Biodiversity support** – By preserving high-quality grasslands, the presence of livestock protects many endangered species, such as ground-nesting birds.

### Rural areas

- **Livestock farming is a cornerstone of rural resilience in Europe**, ensuring landscape preservation, biodiversity maintenance and socio-economic viability by preventing land abandonment, sustaining high-nature-value systems such as Alpine and Dehesa<sup>1</sup> areas, and supporting local economies through employment and territorially anchored value chains; in mountainous, northern, outermost and other constrained regions, it is often the only viable land use due to climatic and geographic limitations. In these areas, extensive grazing maintains open landscapes, prevents scrub encroachment, and underpins rural attractiveness, tourism and broader economic activity.

### Human consumption

- **Food security and resource efficiency** – Livestock farming contributes to food security by utilising marginal land and converting grass and other non-edible biomass into high-quality food. In doing so, it valorises resources not directly usable by humans and supports circular agricultural systems, including nutrient recycling and soil fertility;
- **Production capacity and strategic autonomy** – The livestock sector accounts for around 40% of EU agricultural production. The EU is largely self-sufficient in most animal products, and, in several categories, exceeds 100% self-sufficiency, contributing to food security and generating added value through exports;
- **Nutritional value** – Livestock products provide high-quality protein, essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals, and play a key role in balanced diets, in line with the FAO definition of food security<sup>2</sup>.

### Novel food

- **Food technologies and food system integrity** – While lab-grown and precision fermentation foods are covered under the EU Novel Food framework, young farmers underline that they raise significant uncertainties and potential structural risks to livestock farming and the broader food system; several Member States have called for a cautious and evidence-based approach. Beyond safety assessments alone, a precautionary approach is needed, taking into account impacts on public health, environment, resource use, market structure and rural economies, while ensuring transparency for consumers and clear product labelling, so as not to consider these products, or label them as “meat”. Full transparency should also be made on the funding sources of such products’ development.

### By-products

- **Valorisation of co-products** – Monogastric animals are known for efficient conversion of feed into high-quality protein, while using a wide range of co-products. Animals can also

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<sup>1</sup> The Dehesa is a traditional Mediterranean agro-silvopastoral system found mainly in Spain and Portugal, combining pastureland, scattered oak trees, and livestock grazing.

<sup>2</sup> “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. (World Food Summit, 1996)

valorise grain that does not meet market standards (split grains, peas, beans). Further by-products, such as wool, contribute to the diversity of the European livestock production;

- **Energy production** – Biomethanisation reduces the release of nitrous oxide and methane from the decomposition of manure to produce energy and deliver fertilisers with a higher proportion of mineral nitrogen;
- **Circularity** – Livestock creates opportunities for an on-farm circular economy through the use of organic fertilisers, going beyond manure to the use of by-products from the livestock sector, such as digested manure derived from green energy production.

### Cultural preservation

- **Cultural heritage** – With the preservation of traditional breeds, farming practices, and landscapes, livestock supports regional identities and culinary traditions that are integral to Europe's rich cultural heritage and essential to Geographical Indicators (GIs) and quality food production, which also generate economic added value and sustainable income for farmers;
- **Livestock diversity** – Through the breeding of local and minor dual-purpose breeds that are undergoing genetic erosion, emphasising the role of the farmer as a guardian of the land and livestock genotypes.

Recognising livestock's strategic role and positive externalities is essential to ensure the sector has the means for a sustainable transition. Focusing solely on its challenges and sending negative signals to investors and policymakers risks hampering the sector through reduced investment, diminished support and declining attractiveness for new generations.

Additional resource:

Opinion Piece by CEJA former Vice-Presidents Anne-Catherine Dalcq & Thomas Duffy (2023), "Livestock: an ally of sustainability" ([here](#))

## PART 2: AREAS OF ACTION

### 1. Attractiveness and generational renewal

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Livestock farming struggles to attract younger generations due to the demanding nature of the work, which often includes long hours, limited holidays, and mental health challenges stemming from high work pressure. Additionally, the public perception of livestock farming is increasingly influenced by negative narratives, such as its environmental impact, which discourages interest in the sector.

#### *Challenges:*

- **Lacking competitiveness** – Due to high investment costs when setting up a farm, low margins, unfair trading practices (UTPs) that may occur along the chain, selling below production costs and increasingly stricter legislation leaving little room for manoeuvre and leading to even more investment requirements, all in all rendering the sector unattractive for young farmers and new entrants;
- **Uncertainty about the future** – Lacking predictability regarding future policies impacting agriculture undermines planning security of young farmers when it comes to setting-up in the livestock sector. Young farmers look at the Strategy on the Future of Livestock in the EU to set the scene of the sector regarding its viability in the long-term.

#### *Recommendations:*

- **Sectoral analysis of generational renewal** – Such as access to land, finance, education, and a fair position in the value chain- has long been identified. However, a stronger sector-specific approach is needed to better understand how these challenges materialise across different livestock systems. CEJA's initial sector-based work shows that factors such as investment intensity, price volatility, labour availability, input dependency and perceived attractiveness vary significantly between sectors;
- **Reflections on concrete improvements to quality of life** – For example, on the availability of replacement services for livestock farmers to go on holidays or training opportunities; mental health support; or reduced administrative burden as part of the simplification agenda (e.g., bureaucracy in the case of barn construction);
- **A supporting Common Agricultural Policy** – with:
  - **Maintenance of coupled support for certain sectors in the CAP** – Ensuring its role in supporting vulnerable or strategic productions, while preserving a level playing field and taking into account the diversity of production systems across the EU;
  - **More opportunities for ecosystem services** – Difficulties have been observed in some Member States in identifying suitable support mechanisms for livestock activities within their National Strategic Plans. Greater flexibility is needed to ensure that livestock systems are adequately recognised for their environmental

contributions as well as their productivity and sustainability, that should be maintained;

- **Support to disadvantaged regions** – Livestock farming plays a key role to maintain local economies and landscapes in areas facing natural or structural constraints, and requires continued and adequate support;
  - **Specific measures for young farmers entering the sector** – Dedicated and accessible support is needed to address structural barriers to entry and ensure generational renewal in livestock farming.
- **Education, training, knowledge, research and innovation** – with:
    - Increase funding for R&D on sustainable livestock practices, including emission and methane-reducing technologies and alternative feed systems, while ensuring that the reduction potential of such technologies is scientifically validated and recognised, providing farmers with the legal certainty needed to invest in their uptake;
    - Support research on the health benefits of animal products to counter misleading narratives in public debates;
    - Development of exchange programs to share best practices across Member States.
  - **Promote market opportunities for EU animal products** – This entails keeping an important promotion policy for EU quality food products;
  - **Enhanced educational efforts** – To improve the sector’s image and connect younger generations to the realities and benefits of animal farming;
  - **Incentive based and value chain approach** – Ensuring stable and coherent governance that prioritises incentives over obligations, while providing producers with predictability through improved contractual relations within the sector and enhanced risk management tools that also take production costs into account;
  - **Support the implementation of technology** – To make livestock farming less physically demanding and ensure that farmers have a dignified life. Innovations such as virtual fencing and smart collars that detect calving and animal health issues can significantly improve efficiency and animal welfare while reducing the workload for farmers. Investing in these technologies would not only enhance sustainability but also help retain the next generation of livestock farmers by making the profession more viable and attractive;
  - **Digital infrastructure in rural areas** – Accelerate investment in high-speed broadband and 5G connectivity in rural and remote areas to enable the deployment of smart farming technologies, remote livestock management systems, digital traceability tools, and access to online services. Without modern digital infrastructure, it is difficult to attract and retain young farmers or to ensure the competitiveness, resilience, and environmental performance of livestock production systems.

## 2. Economic barriers

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Livestock farming is particularly exposed to economic constraints due to its capital intensity, long production cycles and high fixed costs, which limit flexibility compared to other farming sectors.

### Challenges:

- **Livestock farmers are facing declining profitability driven by rising input costs**, including feed, energy and fertilisers, combined with volatile prices. As margins tighten, farmers' ability to offer competitive wages is reduced, contributing to labour shortages and increasing workload, which further undermines the attractiveness of the sector. These pressures are exacerbated by trade-related dynamics and global competition, which continue to put downward pressure on producer prices;
- **The transition towards higher animal welfare standards entails high structural costs at farm level.** Wageningen University & Research impact assessment <sup>3</sup> illustrates the scale of the transition towards more animal-friendly livestock systems, estimating total investment needs of €5.9–8.4 billion by 2040 and additional annual farm-level costs ranging from €34,000–136,000 in dairy farming to around €236,000 for finishing pig farms and over €399,000 for sow farms;
- **A key barrier lies in the high level of investment required to establish and maintain livestock production.** Significant upfront capital is needed for infrastructure such as barns, equipment and manure management systems, often combined with long payback periods and increasing regulatory requirements. In the coming years, additional investments will be required to comply with evolving animal welfare and environmental standards, further increasing financial pressure. However, access to finance remains uneven, with young farmers facing particular difficulties due to limited collateral and high initial debt levels. The annual financing gap in EU agriculture is estimated at over €18 billion according to fi-compass<sup>4</sup>, underlining the scale of unmet investment needs;
- **Livestock farms are highly exposed to multiple sources of risk**, including market price volatility, climate-related impacts, animal diseases and geopolitical developments. Due to the long production cycles inherent in livestock systems, farmers cannot rapidly adjust production in response to these shocks, which increases income volatility and weakens farmers' ability to manage cash flow and maintain financial stability;
- **Structural imbalances within the food supply chain further weaken the economic position of livestock farmers.** Limited bargaining power and unequal value distribution between farmers, processors and retailers reduce the sector's ability to absorb cost increases or invest in future improvements. At the same time, farmers face increasing administrative and compliance burdens linked to EU legislation, including

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<sup>3</sup> Wageningen University & Research (2025), *What does an animal-friendly livestock sector cost?*, Jongeneel, R. & Backus, G.

<sup>4</sup> fi-compass, 2023, Financing gap in the agriculture and agri-food sectors in the EU, p. 17.

environmental, animal welfare and food safety requirements. These obligations often generate additional costs that are not sufficiently compensated by the market;

- **Uneven competition between EU producers and imported products creates additional pressure for livestock farmers.** EU livestock farmers are required to comply with some of the highest production standards in the world, while imported products may be produced under less stringent conditions. This creates structural cost asymmetries that weaken farm-level profitability and competitiveness.

Recommendations:

- **Fair pricing mechanisms** – Aligning consumer expectations with fair pricing mechanisms and strengthening the position of farmers across the entire value chain to make them price-setters instead of price-takers; this can also be achieved through a strengthening of the UTPs Directive, taking into account Member States’ best practices that already proved their effectiveness;
- **Clear, long-term planning, policies and market orientations** – Essential to ensure the sector’s visibility and viability. Long-term planning and visibility facilitate investments and investors’ confidence, and ensure predictability for entering the sector for the next generations, including clear long-term signals from the EU and national authorities regarding the future of livestock farming in Europe;
- **Stronger investment support** – To lift the financial burden of high investment costs when taking over a livestock farm, improving young farmers’ access to loans, longer periods of repayment, guaranteeing the ability to recover their investment and reducing administrative barriers and permitting delays for farm infrastructure investments, particularly for the construction or renovation of livestock housing;
- **Provide more guidance on market mechanisms** – Increasing transparency and information-sharing for young farmers, to enhance their understanding of market mechanisms, and their capacity to react and adapt to them;
- **Better organisation of supply chains** – To structure supply, build bargaining power and rebalance costs, margins and prices across the supply chains through mandatory written contracts;
- **Agreements between the farming sector, policymakers and stakeholders of the value chain** – To ensure fairer distribution of value and responsibilities across the food value chain;
- **Improving labour conditions and attractiveness of the sector** – Supporting mechanisms that enable competitive wages, better working conditions and access to skilled labour, particularly in livestock systems, including support for farm relief services to reduce workload;

- **Strengthening financial resilience and financial management skills** – Supporting young farmers in building financial buffers and reserves during profitable periods to better withstand periods of low prices or economic shocks. This is becoming increasingly important as geopolitical tensions, extreme climate conditions and other external factors are likely to increase market volatility on both the input and output markets. Addressing this challenge requires new financial management approaches and targeted support for young farmers;
- **Adequate risk management instruments** – To build resilience to market and other shocks, both at individual and collective levels (cooperatives, producer organisations and interbranch organisations), reinforced with public-private instruments where relevant, and adapted to the longer production cycles in the livestock sector, including instruments to address major sanitary crises and animal disease outbreaks that can severely disrupt livestock markets;
- **Halt EU livestock decapitalisation** – Recognising that regional situations differ across the EU, and that in some areas maintaining or rebuilding livestock production is essential for rural viability, strategic resilience, grassland management and the circular use of manure as an organic fertiliser, while ensuring effective protection of the EU market and full reciprocity of EU standards for imported products;
- **Encourage and support genetic improvement programmes** – Aimed at developing herds with enhanced environmental performance traits, while safeguarding — and where possible increasing their economic value, productive efficiency and animal health and welfare characteristics;
- **Greater EU protein autonomy for feed** – To reinforce the strategic autonomy of the EU in terms of feedstuffs, reducing dependency on third countries.

### 3. Trade in, with and outside of the livestock sector

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International trade is an important source of market opportunities for the EU livestock sector, but also an essential component of its competitiveness and resilience. For young farmers, trade can offer new marketing channels and growth, but it also introduces uncertainties linked to price volatility, global competition and differing production standards.

#### Challenges:

- **Price pressure from global markets** – Livestock sectors, such as beef, dairy and pigmeat are highly exposed to international price fluctuations. This creates uncertainty for young farmers, whose activity is characterised by high investment costs in buildings, animals and equipment. Similar, in sectors such as beef, sheep and poultry operating in more extensive or geographically constrained systems, imports can affect price levels and margins;

- **Differences in production standards for imported products** – Differences in environmental, animal welfare, and labour standards result in asymmetric production costs with third countries. Ensuring comparable rules and standards with trading partners remains a concern for young livestock farmers;
- **Market instability linked to trade shocks** – Livestock markets are sensitive to external disruptions, specifically animal disease outbreaks affecting exports, geopolitical tensions or sudden demand shifts, which can lead to price drops and oversupply on the EU market;
- **Limited transparency for consumers** – A lack of clear information on origin and production methods, particularly in processed meat products, can weaken consumer trust and affect the ability to differentiate EU livestock products.

#### Recommendations:

- **Fair and balanced competition** – The EU must accelerate its work on livestock standards in trade, as announced in the Vision for the Future of Agriculture and Food of 2025. Young farmers wish to integrate animal welfare, the use of veterinary medicines and environmental practices into their reflection;
- **Appropriate safeguards for sensitive sectors** – This should include the use of tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) with volume thresholds linked to market conditions (e.g., share of fresh vs. frozen products) and automatic safeguard clauses that can be triggered in case of significant price drops or import surges in sensitive livestock sectors;
- **Monitoring and transparency of trade impacts** – The establishment of systematic ex-ante and ex-post impact assessments for trade agreements, including sector-specific indicators (prices, margins, volumes), should be systematised. Overall, the EU should reflect on its communications surrounding trade matters, particularly towards sensitive sectors;

**Better response to market volatility** – In line with the economic chapter of this position, the current trade context calls for an expansion and adaptation of risk management tools, both under the CAP and outside of it. Faster activation of market support measures is also of primary importance in livestock sectors, where production cycles are longer (e.g., private storage aid). Market volatility triggered by the geopolitical context and trade wars shall be settled through the dispute settlement body of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and unilateral trade defence instruments where relevant;

- **Coherence with sustainability objectives** – Sustainability chapters in trade agreements (TSD) must include livestock production, with measurable commitments and clear monitoring mechanisms;

- **Promotion of EU livestock products globally** – Both via export promotion programmes, with a specific targeting of high-value markets, and addressing sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) barriers.

## 4. Animal health

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Animal health is a key aspect of sustainable livestock farming, directly influencing productivity, food safety, and environmental impact. Healthy animals require fewer resources. Robust animal health systems help prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases, safeguard public health, and reduce dependency on antibiotics.

### Recommendations:

- **Strengthen prevention-oriented approaches**, with a particular focus on vaccination, biosecurity and early risk mitigation;
- **Consider labour shortages**, especially among veterinarians and skilled labour, which exacerbate challenges in animal health and welfare;
- **Develop an EU blueprint on priority diseases and their transmission**, improving prevention, detection and response mechanisms across Member States;
- **Invest into vaccination potential and strategies**, looking at supply, affordability and accessibility at national and EU-level, considering priority diseases;
- **Strengthen international cooperation on animal health**, recognising the cross-border nature of animal diseases;
- **Address regulatory and trade barriers that disincentivise vaccination**, including restrictions linked to the export of products from vaccinated animals;
- **Develop and improve veterinary services in Member States**, both at the public and private levels, to ensure adequate coverage and rapid response capacity across all regions;
- **Strengthen risk management and insurance tools**, ensuring they are accessible, fit for purpose and cover a more diverse range of risks;
- **Ensure that animal health policies support high animal welfare standards**, recognising the interlinkages between health, welfare and farm management practices;
- **Harmonise EU standards and strengthen coordination**, timely communication between Member States is a key element to prevent animal diseases, as well as clear communication;
- **Provide financial support during and after outbreaks**, such as tax breaks or longer repayment periods when cash flow is impacted, to safeguard farm viability.

Beyond this general outlook, concrete action at the EU and national levels should be taken through three different channels: Prevention, detection and control and management measures.

## 1) Prevention measures:

- **Vaccination:**
  - Support research and dissemination of the DIVA vaccine, which allows for the recognition between vaccinated and infected animals (particularly important for IBR cases). If farmers are not scared of vaccines anymore, prevention against highly infectious and fast-spreading diseases can be reinforced;
  - Increase financial support to vaccinate on-farm;
  - Enforce coordination and production of vaccines between relevant stakeholders to prevent shortages.
- **Promote good practices, guidance and advisory services**, and share more information about disfavoured behaviours;
- **Support a strong immune system of farm animals** through high-quality feed and nutritional balances that support both animal health and welfare;
- **Increase training and knowledge-sharing opportunities** for people working on and with farms;
- **Reduce and control vectors**, such as flies, which transport the virus from one animal to another. Monitoring systems recognising the amount of vectors and thus the height of risk for more infections would support decisions to prevent further spreading, such as keeping animals inside when there is a high-risk case;
- **Biosecurity measures** at individual farms, controlling the incoming of feed, vehicles for animal transports, veterinarians and visitors, and requiring strict hygiene standards for incomers, fences around pastures to prevent spreading of animal diseases via wild animals and neighbours;
- **Stable infrastructure**, such as ventilators and mosquito nets, increasing air circulation in stables, decreasing the temperatures and reducing the accumulation of vectors such as flies;
- **Traceability and monitoring** of spreading diseases in Europe and their vectors, including a geographical mapping of diseases, risk-mitigation strategies and easy access to such information for farmers;
- **Launch broad information campaigns** to counter the spreading of disinformation;
- **Provide financial state support** for regular vaccinations and blood tests, to prevent the economic choice from outweighing the social one and prioritise animal welfare;
- **Designate veterinarians** for traders, increasing their involvement;
- **Increase wild animal control**, to reduce the infection via wild animals such as the African swine fever through wild boars, or the avian flu through birds;
- **Strengthen quarantine requirements**, mandatory confinement of infected animals to prevent spreading through the herd;

### Outbreaks in Europe

- **Avian Influenza (HPAI):** across whole Europe
- **African Swine Fever (ASF):** across whole Europe
- **Blue Tongue (BTV):** across whole Europe
- **Newcastle disease (ND):** across whole Europe
- **Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD):** France, Spain and Italy
- **Bovine Tuberculosis (TB):** Ireland, France
- **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD):** Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, Slovakia, Germany

- **Establish a disease hotline**, at the regional or even local level, to give support and guidance to farmers who are confronted with an outbreak, both on biosecurity and biocontrol measures, but also confronting mental health pressures.

## 2) Detection measures:

- **Improve monitoring systems and cross-border cooperation**, once there is a disease outbreak at the national level or in a neighbouring country;
- **Stimulate the uptake of digital tools** to increase the effectiveness of monitoring systems and the use of data, as well as registrations of infected animals for farmers and traders;
- **Disseminate information on symptoms**, to raise awareness about how to recognise infected animals;
- **Strengthen bridges between researchers and farmers**, to allow for faster and more effective control measures;
- **Increase trust between authorities and farmers**, favouring a fast reaction during outbreaks, application of strategies and biosecurity measures.

## 3) Control and management measures:

- **Multi-actor cooperation**, increasing joint and proper communications about biosecurity and control measures, and next steps to take in the case of outbreaks;
- **Cross-border cooperation**, adopting similar approaches/measures to prevent further spreading and harmonise management mechanisms;
- **Electronic registrations of infected animals and outbreaks**, facilitating the mapping of current health situations and decision-making on next steps, both on-farm and during transports;
- **Crisis management systems**, supporting the economic viability of farms, in case mass culling must take place;
- **Dissemination of information and awareness-raising**, e.g. through webinars, informative events or public campaigns, also to counter disinformation;
- **Increase control and monitoring of animal transports**, to raise predictability of disease spreading and support planning security;
- **Develop a European strategy** to harmonise control measures and response between Member States and increase cross-border response mechanisms;
- **Ensure that response strategies balance between animal health, animal welfare and economic considerations**, when it comes to decision-making in case of outbreaks (e.g., vaccination vs culling depending on animal welfare, biosecurity, market prices);
- **Advisory services**, providing essential support to farmers and clarifying the requirements prescribed by law in case of an outbreak.

## 5. Animal welfare

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CEJA acknowledges the importance of animal welfare and its growing consideration in societal expectations and consumption choices. The EU is currently revising the legislation on animal welfare.

*Young farmers underline the following key considerations :*

**Animal welfare is crucial to the daily work of livestock farmers.** It is<sup>2</sup> not only as a response to civil society and consumers but also as a personal duty, given farmers' understanding of the social, societal, economic and farmer well-being benefits of a physically healthy and unstressed herd.

**Animal welfare improvements take place within financial, time-related, technical and sanitary constraints.** Transitions towards higher animal welfare standards require adequate support, including investment in infrastructure, access to innovation and knowledge, and realistic transition periods. In addition, certain trade-offs may arise between animal welfare, animal health and environmental objectives, which need to be carefully balanced and addressed through science-based approaches. In some cases, the lack of viable alternatives to meet animal health requirements, such as the continued need for antibiotics to treat clinical diseases, highlights these inherent tensions.

**Animal welfare is a shared responsibility across the value chain.** Responsibilities, costs and risks should be fairly distributed among all actors, including farmers, veterinarians, input suppliers, processors, retailers and consumers. Market mechanisms should adequately remunerate the efforts made by farmers to improve animal welfare.

**Young farmers call for the need to address societal misunderstandings and perceptions,** for example, regarding practices such as the separation of calves and cows after birth. A gap remains high between farm realities and consumer expectations, which requires better communication, transparency and awareness-raising.

**The revision of EU animal transport rules should remain science-based, proportionate and adapted to the diversity** of livestock systems and geographical conditions across Europe, while ensuring both animal welfare and the economic viability of livestock farming.

**Animal welfare improvements must balance animal comfort with practical feasibility on farms,** taking into account animal health, farm management realities, and the safety of both farmers and animals.

*Recommendations:*

- **Ensure a science-based and proportionate approach** in the development and revision of animal welfare legislation, taking into account the diversity of livestock systems;
- **Clarify existing legislation** in line with the most recent developments;
- **Privilege control and enforcement** as the first step towards harmonisation;
- **Maintain a science-based approach** in all regulatory steps;
- **Support farmers** in their uptake of animal welfare practices through funding and investment support;

- **Promote a greater exchange of knowledge** and facilitate the acquisition of skills;
- **Upgrade collective action** on data collection and monitoring;
- **Ensure reciprocity in trade** with third countries, with comparable production standards and an equal playing field;
- **Develop sector-based strategies**, respecting the production diversity and realities of the European livestock sector;
- **Support investments into livestock farms**, since many farms are outdated and require investments, which represent a large financial burden and are often the reason why young farmers decide not to set up in the livestock sector;
- **Recognise and address the economic implications of higher animal welfare standards**, ensuring that additional costs do not undermine farm viability or competitiveness;
- **Ensure a level playing field across Europe** with regard to animal health and welfare standards and their implementation;
- **Enhance communication towards consumers**, improving understanding of livestock farming practices and existing welfare standards.

*Additional resource:*

CEJA (2022), “Animal Welfare”, position paper, June 2022 - [here](#)

## 6. Environmental challenges

In some parts of Europe, livestock farming faces environmental challenges linked to negative externalities. Young farmers are fully aware of these challenges and are already taking action to address them. However, addressing environmental sustainability in livestock systems requires a balanced and realistic approach, acknowledging the complexity of on-farm decision-making and the trade-offs involved.

At the farm level, environmental objectives are often interlinked and sometimes contradictory. For instance, optimised feed can reduce nitrogen losses in manure but may rely on imported feed crops, contributing to deforestation and strategic dependency. Similarly, higher animal welfare standards, such as more space in free-range systems, can lead to increased emissions per animal due to lower production efficiency. A forward-looking policy framework should therefore recognise these trade-offs, build on the progress already achieved by farmers, and provide appropriate tools and incentives to support further improvements in environmental performance.

### ***Greenhouse gas emissions***

Young farmers realise that solutions must be found to address the emissions stemming from the livestock sector. These emissions are due to a combination of management practices and unavoidable natural processes. To ensure a future in the livestock sector, as stated by the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture, it will be essential to:

- **Recognise the specific nature of biogenic emissions from livestock** – Livestock-related emissions differ structurally from fossil-based emissions due to their integration into short carbon cycles. Livestock systems are also linked to carbon sequestration

through grassland management, which should be taken into account in climate policy frameworks. In this context, current climate accounting methodologies, particularly those based on GWP100, do not adequately reflect the different behaviour of short-lived gases such as methane and tend to overestimate the warming impact of livestock-related emissions. This leads to a distorted representation of the sector's real climate impact. Methane emissions from livestock – both enteric and from manure – remain in the atmosphere for about 10–12 years before breaking down into CO<sub>2</sub> and water. Unlike fossil CO<sub>2</sub>, which accumulates over centuries, biogenic carbon is part of a natural cycle. Stable methane emissions do not contribute to additional warming in the same way as fossil emissions, while recent reductions in emissions in Europe contribute to climate mitigation efforts. In this context, it is essential to develop and adopt more appropriate metrics that reflect the specific nature of biogenic methane;

- **Establish a comprehensive and harmonised GHG accounting methodology** – That reflects the diversity of agricultural systems and their regional and structural conditions, including proper recognition of soil carbon sequestration and grassland management. The EU should provide tools to measure and manage CO<sub>2</sub> capture in livestock farming;
- **Support the implementation of management measures** – Promote access to investment across agriculture and territories to advance towards emissions reduction goals. On-farm manure management and technologies hold high promises to reduce the emissions generated and improve the circularity of on-farm nutrient management. However, such technologies come at high investment costs, which young farmers need support for;
- **Support innovation at the production-unit level** – While avoiding general reductions in livestock numbers at EU level, particularly in regions where livestock activity is already declining or limited. A territorial approach towards the future of livestock in Europe is crucial to ensure that national and regional specificities are not neglected, and respond to the regional specificities;
- **Unlock opportunities for improving productivity and reducing emissions** – Including genetic selection of the herd to improve animals' efficiency, feed additives, improving manure management and animal housing infrastructure, and closing the nutrient cycle through better forage and grassland management;
- **Invest in research, knowledge-sharing, and innovation** – Strengthening collaboration and exchange of best practices to ensure that innovative livestock practices are adopted across the EU;
- **Strengthen research, knowledge transfer, and advisory systems** – To accelerate the uptake of proven mitigation technologies across Member States;
- **Valorise by-products** – Such as the remaining protein stemming from the processing of soybeans for different end purposes, used by the European livestock sector for animal feed (source);

- **Incentivise on-farm circularity** – Policies promoting circularity at the individual farm level to create opportunities for the circular economy, decreasing input costs and dependency, while valorising by-products of own livestock productions;
- **Promote genetic improvement in livestock** – Genetic improvement can significantly increase efficiency per animal and reduce GHG emissions from the livestock sector. In the dairy sector in particular, genetic progress offers important opportunities to improve production efficiency, for example by producing more milk with lower input levels. This improves farm profitability while lowering the carbon footprint per unit of production, recognising that European livestock systems are already among the most efficient globally;
- **Improve data collection and availability** – Improving the availability and accessibility of farm-level data to support informed decision-making, monitor emissions reductions and facilitate the adoption of mitigation practices, while ensuring farmers’ control over their data and their ability to decide how and with whom it is shared.

### *Nature, biodiversity, and the use of natural resources*

Livestock and grazing play a key role in nature management, conservation, and on-farm circularity. Policy-wise and for the sake of enhanced mutual benefits between nature, biodiversity and livestock, farmers need:

- **Recognition of the importance of livestock in circular farming systems** – While promoting a holistic approach to agriculture that takes into account the multiple environmental functions and ecosystem services provided by livestock systems;
- **Economically viable conservation efforts** – With incentivisation over cost-coverage only, better access to credit and investment, and a common definition for market and regulatory efforts;
- **Integrated ecological approaches** – Agriculture needs both nature-oriented approaches and technological solutions that have a holistic view of all externalities;
- **Certainty and simplicity in nature governance** – Alignment and simplification efforts are needed to reduce overregulation and administrative burdens. Better coordination and consistency checks for policies across all governance levels and simplifying efforts for end-users, through a centralised entry point or a flexible ‘menu’ approach, could empower decision-making;
- **Cooperation with practitioners** – Agricultural nature and landscape collectives can boost conservation efforts by enabling cooperation of farmers, landowners, and governments to share practices, knowledge, and achieve economies of scale. Their success depends largely on adequate policy support, funding, and evaluation frameworks;

- **Technologies for manure management** – New methods regarding injection and near-ground application of manure contribute to preventing run-off from the field and erosion. Technologies to up-scale manure into other types of fertilisers (e.g. RENURE and digestate) are crucial to account for the excessive production of organic fertilisers; the Nitrates Directive should be amended in order to unlock the potential of digestate and RENURE, and reduce EU dependency on imported chemical fertilisers. Leakage-prevention layers below manure storages in protected water areas equally aim at avoiding nutrient loss into the soils and water-sensitive areas;
- **Adequate on-farm monitoring** – To improve practices related to water and nutrient management, the sources of pollution and leakages must be identified. To enable informed decision-making at the farm level, consistent data about the nutrient balance on-farm is necessary, requiring appropriate advisory services providing guidance in nutrient management and investments in relation to the respective agricultural production.

Additional resource:

CEJA (2024), *Built on mutual benefits – young farmers’ position towards nature, biodiversity and agriculture*”, position paper, November 2024 ([here](#)).

CEJA (2026), *Every drop counts-Young farmers’ vision for future water management in agriculture*, position paper, January 2026 ([here](#)).

### **Wildlife conflicts**

The increasing population of large carnivores is causing more and more livestock losses (especially by wolves<sup>5</sup>), with economic and psychological impacts for farmers. Outdated legislation and data collection methods are limiting the management options to reduce these conflicts. CEJA welcomed the European Commission’s recent decision to revisit the protection status of the wolf under the Habitats Directive, as well as the change in the Bern Convention.

## **7. Public perception and societal debates**

Livestock farming is often portrayed negatively, overshadowing its diversity and multitude of sectors, but also its contributions to society, food systems, and ecosystems. Public discourses are dominated by extreme views, sidelining moderate and highly needed fact-based analysis. The nutritional value of animal products and their role in balanced diets are increasingly questioned without sufficient scientific backing in public debates. Misalignment between consumer expectations, media narratives, and the reality of farming creates a divide between rural and urban populations.

### Recommendations:

<sup>5</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5d017e4e-9efc-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

- **Ensure a balanced and fact-based perception of the livestock sector** – Recognising the diversity of sectors, production systems and regional contexts, and highlighting the positive contributions of livestock to society, the environment and the economy;
- **Bridge the communication gap between stakeholders** – Improving understanding and dialogue between stakeholders, including farmers, policymakers, consumers, and environmental and animal rights NGOs, from the production level to gastronomy. Actively taking part in debates around livestock on the social, economic and environmental front will offer farmers the opportunity to shed light on the realities on the ground;
- **Improve consumer information and transparency** – Including through public campaigns, labelling and communication initiatives across the food chain, from production to gastronomy. This should also include the protection of meat denominations to ensure clear and accurate identification of animal products;
- **Showcase the progress and developments achieved** – Young farmers are entrepreneurs, aiming to develop their businesses with new technologies, digital tools and innovations, to improve animal welfare, efficiency and profitability;
- **Greater involvement of farmers and farmers' organisations in education activities** – It is essential to have better-informed consumers. Farmers and their associations can share practical knowledge on sustainable livestock, animal welfare, and local food quality, as well as the passion they put into their daily work and the care they dedicate to their animals.



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