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**SEED'S Planning Solidarity Economy Districts for Social,  
Economic, and Environmental Sustainability  
Module 1 : Sustainable agriculture in Europe**



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## Brief introduction about the module and its objectives and competences

Sustainable agriculture represents a key pillar in Europe's efforts to create a more resilient and environmentally-friendly future.

By balancing economic viability, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility, sustainable agriculture seeks to meet current needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

This module will delve into the principles, practices, and impacts of sustainable agriculture within the European context taking into consideration that sustainable agriculture is not merely an idealistic vision but a practical necessity in addressing the pressing environmental, economic, and social challenges Europe faces today. With the European Union's Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy emphasizing the transition to sustainable food systems, understanding and implementing sustainable agricultural practices has never been more crucial.



# Brief introduction about the module and its objectives and competences



## Learning Objectives



1. Ethical and sustainable thinking: reflect on how sustainable long-term social, cultural and economic goals are, and the course of action chosen.
2. Promoting nature: to acknowledge that humans are part of nature; and to respect the needs and rights of other species and of nature itself in order to restore and regenerate healthy and resilient ecosystems.
3. Systems thinking: to approach a sustainability problem from all sides; to consider time, space and context in order to understand how elements interact within and between systems.
4. Political agency : to navigate the political system, identify political responsibility and accountability for unsustainable behaviour, and demand effective policies for sustainability.



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture



What is the link between agriculture and sustainability?  
What does 'sustainable agriculture' mean and why is the spread of sustainable production systems a key element?

Dr Luisa Paolotti, from the Department of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences at the University of Perugia, explains.

[Watch the video from here](#)



## INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

ENGLISH



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture



## Definition and Principles

Sustainable agriculture is a method of farming that prioritizes long-term land productivity and utility while minimizing environmental impact and promoting social equity. It encompasses practices that maintain the health of the environment, ensure economic profitability for farmers, and foster fair and beneficial conditions for farm workers and local communities.

The concept of sustainable agriculture integrates three main objectives: a healthy environment, economic profitability, and social equity. These objectives are interdependent and require a holistic approach to ensure that farming systems can endure and thrive.



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture

## Environmental Health



Environmental health in sustainable agriculture involves minimizing the use of non-renewable resources, reducing pollution, and preserving natural ecosystems. This is achieved through practices like crop rotation, which helps maintain soil fertility, and integrated pest management, which reduces the need for chemical pesticides. These methods help protect the environment while maintaining agricultural productivity.

Crop rotation prevents soil degradation by alternating the types of crops grown on a particular piece of land, which helps maintain a balance of nutrients in the soil. Integrated pest management (IPM) reduces reliance on chemical pesticides by using natural predators, crop rotation, and biological controls to manage pest populations. Additionally, agroforestry practices, which integrate trees and shrubs into farming systems, enhance biodiversity, improve water retention, and provide habitat for wildlife.



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture



## Economic Profitability

Economic viability is crucial for the long-term success of sustainable agriculture. Farmers must be able to make a living from their land, which means sustainable practices need to be economically feasible. This often involves reducing reliance on costly inputs like synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and instead using natural methods to enhance soil fertility and manage pests.

Sustainable agriculture can reduce costs by promoting the use of locally available resources and reducing dependency on chemical inputs. Moreover, sustainable products often command higher prices in the market, especially in niche markets for organic and locally-sourced foods. Developing diverse income streams, such as agro-tourism and direct sales through farmers' markets, can also enhance economic stability for farmers.



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture



## Social and Economic Equity

Social equity is a key principle of sustainable agriculture. This means ensuring fair wages and working conditions for farm workers, supporting local communities, and promoting food security. Sustainable agriculture aims to provide benefits to all stakeholders, from farmers and workers to consumers and local communities.

Fair labor practices in sustainable agriculture ensure that farm workers receive fair wages and work in safe conditions. Supporting local communities through initiatives like community-supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets strengthens local economies and provides consumers with access to fresh, locally-produced food. By promoting food security, sustainable agriculture helps ensure that all members of the community have access to nutritious, affordable food.



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# Understanding Sustainable Agriculture

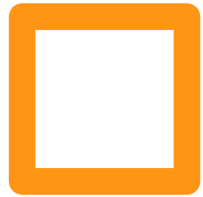


## Historical Context

Europe has a long and varied history of agricultural practices, evolving from traditional methods to modern, intensive farming techniques. However, this intensification has often led to negative environmental and social consequences. The shift towards sustainable agriculture is a response to these challenges, aiming to develop farming practices that are environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially just. In fact, the 20th century saw a dramatic increase in agricultural productivity through the Green Revolution, which introduced high-yield crop varieties and intensive farming techniques. However, these advances came at a cost, including soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and social inequalities. Today, sustainable agriculture seeks to address these issues by integrating traditional knowledge with modern science and technology.



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# The Environmental Impact of Agriculture



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# The Environmental Impact of Agriculture



## Soil Health and Conservation

One of the primary concerns in sustainable agriculture is maintaining **soil health**. Traditional farming methods often lead to soil degradation through erosion, nutrient depletion, and loss of organic matter. Sustainable practices, such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and reduced tillage, help preserve soil structure and fertility. These methods also support soil biodiversity, which is essential for soil health and productivity.

Crop rotation involves growing different types of crops in the same area in sequential seasons. This practice helps prevent the depletion of specific nutrients in the soil, as different plants have varying nutrient requirements. Cover cropping, on the other hand, involves planting certain crops that cover the soil and protect it from erosion. These crops also add organic matter to the soil, improving its structure and fertility. Reduced tillage minimizes soil disturbance, helping maintain soil structure and reduce erosion.

Cover crops, such as clover or rye, protect the soil from erosion by providing ground cover during off-seasons. These crops also improve soil structure and fertility by adding organic matter when they decompose. Reduced tillage methods, such as no-till farming, preserve soil structure and reduce erosion by leaving crop residues on the field and minimizing soil disturbance.



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# The Environmental Impact of Agriculture



## Water Management

Efficient water use and management are critical components of sustainable agriculture. Conventional farming can lead to significant water waste and pollution, adversely affecting local ecosystems. Sustainable practices, such as drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and maintaining riparian buffers, help reduce water consumption and prevent contamination of water sources. These methods ensure that water resources are used wisely and remain available for future generations.

Drip irrigation delivers water directly to the roots of plants, reducing water waste through evaporation and runoff. This method is particularly useful in areas with limited water resources. Rainwater harvesting involves collecting and storing rainwater for agricultural use, reducing the need for groundwater extraction. Maintaining riparian buffers – vegetated areas along water bodies – helps filter runoff and prevent pollutants from entering water sources.

Drip irrigation systems can significantly reduce water use by delivering water directly to the plant root zone, minimizing evaporation and runoff. Rainwater harvesting systems capture and store rainwater from roofs and other surfaces for later use in irrigation. Riparian buffers, or vegetated strips along waterways, act as filters to trap sediments, nutrients, and pollutants, improving water quality and protecting aquatic ecosystems.



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# The Environmental Impact of Agriculture



## Biodiversity

Biodiversity is crucial for the resilience and productivity of agricultural systems. Monoculture practices, common in conventional agriculture, reduce biodiversity and make crops more susceptible to pests and diseases. Sustainable agriculture promotes biodiversity through techniques like intercropping, agroforestry, and maintaining natural habitats within agricultural landscapes. These practices create a more resilient farming system that can better withstand environmental stresses.

Intercropping involves growing two or more crops together, which can enhance biodiversity and reduce pest and disease problems. Agroforestry integrates trees and shrubs into agricultural systems, providing habitat for wildlife and improving soil health. Maintaining natural habitats within agricultural landscapes supports biodiversity and helps preserve ecosystem services.

Intercropping can reduce pest and disease pressure by diversifying plant species within a field, which disrupts pest and disease cycles. Agroforestry practices, such as planting trees and shrubs alongside crops, enhance biodiversity and provide multiple benefits, including improved soil health, enhanced carbon sequestration, and increased habitat for wildlife. Preserving natural habitats within agricultural landscapes, such as hedgerows and wetlands, supports biodiversity and maintains ecosystem services, such as pollination and water filtration.



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# The Environmental Impact of Agriculture

## Climate Change Mitigation

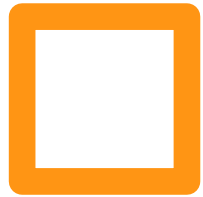
Agriculture is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, but it also has the potential to mitigate climate change. Sustainable practices, such as organic farming, carbon sequestration in soils, and reduced reliance on fossil fuels, help lower the carbon footprint of agriculture. By adopting these methods, farmers can play a crucial role in combating climate change and building a more sustainable future.

Organic farming avoids the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, which are major sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, organic farmers use natural inputs like compost and manure to enhance soil fertility. Carbon sequestration involves storing carbon in soils and plants, which can help offset emissions from agricultural activities. Reducing reliance on fossil fuels involves using renewable energy sources and energy-efficient practices on farms.

Organic farming practices enhance soil health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by avoiding synthetic inputs and promoting the use of organic matter. Carbon sequestration techniques, such as cover cropping and reduced tillage, increase the amount of carbon stored in soils, helping mitigate climate change. Renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, can reduce the carbon footprint of farming operations by providing clean, sustainable energy.







# The Economic and social dimensions



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# The Economic and social dimensions



## Economic Viability for Farmers

Ensuring that farming is economically viable is essential for the long-term success of sustainable agriculture. Sustainable practices can lead to cost savings on inputs like fertilizers and pesticides. Additionally, organic and sustainably produced products often fetch premium prices in the market, providing higher income for farmers. Diversifying income sources through activities such as agro-tourism and value-added products also contributes to economic stability.

Agro-tourism involves inviting visitors to farms to experience agricultural activities and learn about farming practices. This can provide an additional source of income for farmers and promote sustainable agriculture to a broader audience. Value-added products, such as jams, cheeses, and other processed goods, can also provide higher income for farmers compared to raw agricultural products. Agro-tourism can create additional revenue streams by attracting visitors who are interested in learning about farming practices and experiencing rural life. This not only generates income but also raises awareness about sustainable agriculture



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# The Economic and social dimensions



## Market Access and Fair Trade

Access to fair and equitable markets is crucial for the economic viability of sustainable agriculture. Fair trade practices ensure that farmers receive fair compensation for their products, promoting economic stability and reducing poverty. By supporting fair trade, consumers can contribute to the livelihoods of farmers and the sustainability of agricultural systems.

This can help small-scale farmers achieve economic stability and invest in sustainable farming practices. Consumers can support fair trade by purchasing products with fair trade labels, which indicates that the products meet fair trade standards.

Fair trade certification can open new market opportunities for small-scale farmers, helping them achieve economic stability and invest in sustainable practices. Consumers can support fair trade by purchasing certified products, which ensures that their purchases contribute to equitable and sustainable agricultural systems.



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# The Economic and social dimensions

## Labor Conditions

Sustainable agriculture advocates for fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for workers' rights. These principles address the exploitation often seen in conventional farming and ensure that farm workers are treated with dignity and respect. By improving labor conditions, sustainable agriculture contributes to social equity and justice.

Fair wages ensure that farm workers receive compensation that reflects the value of their work. Safe working conditions involve providing protective equipment, training, and other measures to prevent accidents and health issues. Respect for workers' rights includes recognizing their right to organize, providing adequate rest periods, and ensuring that their work does not involve exploitative practices.

Improving labor conditions in agriculture is essential for promoting social justice and equity. Fair wages and safe working conditions ensure that farm workers are treated with dignity and respect, reducing exploitation and improving their quality of life. Recognizing workers' rights, such as the right to organize and access to rest periods, enhances their well-being and contributes to the overall sustainability of agricultural systems.



# The Economic and social dimensions

## Community Development

Local food systems, farmers' markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) are integral parts of sustainable agriculture. These initiatives strengthen community bonds and support local economies by keeping food dollars within the community. They also provide consumers with fresh, locally produced food, enhancing food security and nutrition.

Local food systems involve producing and consuming food within a specific geographic area, reducing the environmental impact of food transportation. Farmers' markets provide a direct sales outlet for farmers, allowing them to receive a higher price for their products and interact with consumers. Moreover, CSA programs involve consumers purchasing shares of a farm's produce in advance, providing farmers with a stable income and ensuring consumers receive fresh, seasonal produce.

Farmers' markets offer a direct sales outlet for farmers, increasing their income and providing consumers with access to fresh, locally-produced food, creating a direct connection between farmers and consumers, promoting food security and nutrition by ensuring a stable supply of seasonal produce.



# The Economic and social dimensions



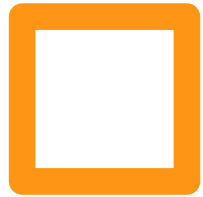
## Food Security and Nutrition

Sustainable agriculture plays a crucial role in ensuring food security by providing a stable supply of nutritious, affordable food. By reducing dependency on imported goods and promoting local food production, sustainable agriculture helps communities become more self-sufficient and resilient to global food market fluctuations.

Food security involves ensuring that all people have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Sustainable agriculture contributes to food security by maintaining soil fertility, conserving water resources, and promoting biodiversity. These practices help ensure that agricultural systems remain productive and resilient, even in the face of environmental and economic challenges.



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# Sustainable agriculture practices



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# Sustainable agriculture practices



Sustainable agriculture is an integrated approach to farming that aims to produce food, fiber, and other plant or animal products in a manner that protects the environment, public health, human communities, and animal welfare. By adopting sustainable practices, farmers can create more resilient agricultural systems that are capable of adapting to changing environmental conditions while maintaining productivity. Here, we delve into various sustainable agriculture practices, examining their benefits and contributions to a more sustainable and resilient food system.



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# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Crop Rotation and Diversity

Crop rotation and diversity are fundamental practices in sustainable agriculture. Crop rotation involves growing different types of crops in the same area in sequential seasons, while crop diversity refers to planting a variety of crops within a particular agricultural system. These practices help maintain soil health by varying the nutrient demands of different crops and breaking pest and disease cycles. For instance, legumes like beans and peas can be rotated with cereals such as wheat and corn to naturally replenish soil nitrogen, thereby reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. Crop diversity also enhances economic stability by diversifying income sources for farmers and mitigating the risks associated with market fluctuations and climate variability.





# Sustainable agriculture practices



## Agroforestry

Agroforestry is the integration of trees and shrubs into crop and livestock farming systems. This practice promotes biodiversity, enhances soil conservation, and contributes to climate change mitigation. Trees in agroforestry systems provide habitat for various species, stabilize the soil with their root systems, and sequester carbon dioxide, helping to reduce greenhouse gas levels. Two common agroforestry techniques are alley cropping, which involves planting rows of trees with crops in between, and silvopasture, which combines forestry and grazing of domesticated animals in a mutually beneficial way. These systems create a more diverse and productive agricultural landscape.



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# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Conservation Tillage

Conservation tillage minimizes soil disturbance and maintains crop residue on the soil surface. This practice helps preserve soil structure and organic matter, improving water infiltration and retention, and reducing erosion by protecting the soil from the erosive forces of wind and water. No-till farming, where seeds are directly sown into the soil without plowing, and strip tillage, where tillage is confined to narrow strips where seeds will be planted, are effective methods of conservation tillage. These approaches not only conserve soil moisture and reduce erosion but also decrease fuel and labor costs.



# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an ecosystem-based strategy that focuses on long-term prevention of pests through a combination of techniques. IPM aims to reduce the reliance on chemical pesticides, thereby minimizing environmental contamination and the risk of pests developing resistance to these chemicals. Biological control methods, such as using natural predators or parasites to control pest populations, are integral to IPM. Cultural practices, including crop rotation and planting pest-resistant crop varieties, as well as mechanical controls like physical removal of pests and the use of barriers, are also essential components of IPM. These strategies collectively create a more balanced and sustainable approach to pest management.



# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Organic Farming

Organic farming avoids synthetic inputs, such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, relying instead on natural processes to maintain soil fertility and control pests. This practice enhances soil health through the use of organic matter, promotes biodiversity by supporting a diverse ecosystem both above and below the ground, and improves food safety by reducing the risk of contamination by harmful chemicals. Natural fertilizers like compost, green manure, and animal manures are used to enrich the soil, while pest management involves biological control methods and the use of organic pesticides. Crop rotation and polyculture, which ensure crop and variety diversity, are also fundamental principles of organic farming.



# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Water Management

Effective water management practices are crucial for ensuring the efficient use of water resources in agriculture. Techniques such as drip irrigation, which delivers water directly to the root zone of plants, significantly reduce evaporation and runoff. Rainwater harvesting involves collecting and storing rainwater for irrigation, while contour farming, which involves planting along the natural contours of the land, helps reduce runoff and soil erosion. These practices not only conserve water but also ensure that crops receive adequate moisture, improving yield and quality, and protecting surrounding water bodies and ecosystems from agricultural runoff.



# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Livestock Integration

Integrating livestock into farming systems can provide numerous benefits, including nutrient cycling, weed control, and economic diversification. Animals contribute to soil fertility by providing manure that enriches the soil, while grazing livestock can help manage weeds and cover crops. Practices such as rotational grazing, where livestock are moved between pastures to prevent overgrazing, and manure management, which involves collecting and composting manure for use as fertilizer, are key components of sustainable livestock integration. This approach not only improves farm productivity but also diversifies income streams through the sale of meat, dairy, or wool.



# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Precision Agriculture

Precision agriculture employs technology to monitor and manage field variability in crops, optimizing the use of inputs like water, fertilizers, and pesticides. GPS technology is used for mapping fields and monitoring crop health, while drones provide aerial imaging and data collection. Soil sensors monitor soil moisture and nutrient levels, allowing for precise application of inputs. These technologies enhance resource efficiency, increase yields, and reduce the environmental footprint of farming activities, making precision agriculture a powerful tool for sustainable farming.





# Sustainable agriculture practices

## Sustainable Aquaculture

Sustainable aquaculture involves farming aquatic organisms in a way that mimics natural ecosystems. This practice supports food security by providing a steady source of protein and income, while also promoting environmental stewardship by reducing the impact on natural water bodies and ecosystems. Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) cultivates multiple species together, such as fish, shellfish, and seaweed, to mimic natural interactions and enhance ecosystem health. Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS) use closed-loop systems to recycle water and reduce waste, making aquaculture more sustainable and efficient.





# European agricultural policies and strategies



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# European agricultural policies and strategies



European agriculture has a rich and varied history, deeply embedded in the continent's cultural and economic fabric. From the ancient grain fields of Greece and Rome to the modern, highly mechanized farms of today, the ways in which Europeans produce food have continually evolved. However, the agricultural sector faces numerous challenges that require well-thought-out policies and strategies. These include ensuring food security, supporting rural communities, promoting environmental sustainability, and adapting to climate change. In this context, the European Union (EU) has developed comprehensive agricultural policies and strategies, with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) being a cornerstone. This paper explores the history, evolution, and current state of European agricultural policies, with a particular focus on sustainability initiatives such as the Farm to Fork Strategy.



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# European agricultural policies and strategies

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# European agricultural policies and strategies



## Historical Context: The Evolution of European Agriculture

Agriculture has always been a key economic activity in Europe. Historically, the sector was characterized by small-scale, family-run farms producing a variety of crops and livestock for local consumption. The Industrial Revolution brought about significant changes, including the introduction of mechanized farming equipment, chemical fertilizers, and improved crop varieties. These advancements led to higher productivity but also resulted in environmental degradation and social upheavals, such as rural depopulation.

In the aftermath of World War II, Europe faced severe food shortages. This crisis underscored the need for a coordinated approach to agricultural production and rural development. The Treaty of Rome in 1957, which established the European Economic Community (EEC), laid the groundwork for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which was officially launched in 1962. The primary objectives of the CAP were to increase agricultural productivity, ensure a fair standard of living for farmers, stabilize markets, secure food supplies, and provide consumers with reasonably priced food.



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# European agricultural policies and strategies



## History of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Established in 1962, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a longstanding initiative of the EU aimed at fostering cooperation between European farmers and citizens. The CAP was introduced to remove restrictions on the free movement of agricultural products among member states, which were caused by national intervention mechanisms that conflicted with the common market guarantees. This policy was essential to ensure food availability and affordability for Europe's population and to secure a decent standard of living for its farmers. Consequently, the CAP was aligned with the central objectives outlined in Article 39 of the Treaty of Rome. The Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) after World War II, provided a framework for member countries to pursue shared agricultural goals through a common policy. These goals included increasing agricultural productivity through technological advances, ensuring market stability, maintaining a consistent supply of safe agricultural products, guaranteeing affordable food prices, and ensuring fair earnings for farmers. Additionally, the CAP promotes the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity.



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# European agricultural policies and strategies



## Timeline: the Common Agricultural Policy



The Common Agricultural Policy has long been one of the EU's flagship policies.

Let's take a look back at how it has shaped European farming thanks to this video of the European Parliament.



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# European agricultural policies and strategies



Date	CAP Step
1962	The common agricultural policy is born. The CAP is conceived as a common policy, with the objectives of providing affordable food for EU citizens and a fair standard of living for farmers.
1984	Farms become so productive that they grow more food than needed. Several measures are introduced to bring production levels closer to what the market needs.
1992	The CAP shifts from market support to producer support. Price support is scaled down and replaced with direct payments to farmers. They are encouraged to be more environmentally friendly. The reform coincides with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which launches the principle of sustainable development.
2003	The CAP provides income support. A new CAP reform cuts the link between subsidies and production. Farmers now receive an income support, on condition that they look after the farmland and fulfil food safety, environmental, animal health and welfare standards.
2013	The CAP is reformed to strengthen the competitiveness of the sector, promote sustainable farming and innovation, support jobs and growth in rural areas and to move financial assistance towards the productive use of land. The reformed CAP is in place for the 2014-20 programming period.
2021	After extensive negotiations, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission agree on further reform of the CAP. This provisional political agreement paves the way for the formal approval of the necessary legislation by the European Parliament and the Council in the autumn of 2021.
2021-2022	During these years, a transitional regulation is in force. The regulation extends most of the CAP rules that were in place during the 2014-20 period, while also ensuring a smooth transition to the future framework of the <a href="#">CAP Strategic Plans</a> .
2023	The CAP Strategic Plans are being implemented in all EU countries since 1 January 2023.



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# European agricultural policies and strategies



## Environmental sustainability in the CAP



The common agricultural policy (CAP) has three environmental goals, which are echoed in the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy: tackling climate change, protecting natural resources and enhancing biodiversity. These goals are supported by the CAP's promotion of organic farming and the responsible management of inputs like pesticides and fertilisers. The CAP aims to reach its environmental goals in a way that is socially and economically sustainable for farmers and rural communities.

This infoclip illustrates an example of a sustainable farm in Enghien, Belgium.



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