

# **European Farm to Fork Strategy in the Time of Food Insecurity**

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to introduce the EU Farm to Fork strategy adopted in 2020. The underlying novel strategy was launched in a challenging period of global turmoil of the pandemic that triggered an economic crisis followed by Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. This occurred at the time when the world was already dealing with an issue of a global climate change. Political instability became the backdrop for a discussion on the wisdom of introducing a strategy perceived by many as a threat to food security. This coincided with a time when the term 'food security' was gaining popularity in the EU context. The term has taken centre stage primarily due to political considerations. The existential importance of food makes it crucial for the survival and development of countries, which is why it is a key issue for security. The ongoing availability of food is becoming an increasingly great challenge for many countries due to factors beyond their control. The unequal distribution of resources intensifies competition for access, potentially leading to conflicts or wars. In 2011, Cribb highlighted that challenges such as decreasing arable land resources, depleting drinking water reserves, and adverse climate change are significantly diminishing the potential for food production. Individually, these changes may not pose insurmountable problems for individual countries or the whole international community. However, the interconnected nature of these phenomena extends beyond the scope of individual countries' perspectives, meaning that a solution to one problem could exacerbate another<sup>1</sup>. There appear several factors that impact food security, including armed conflicts, climate change, energy price volatility, reduction in land available for cultivation, and, particularly in highly developed societies such as the EU - the consumption model and the waste and loss of food.

With the discourse revolving around the challenges to agriculture, the potential for paradigm shifts in our approach to this very industry, the significance of agriculture in its most comprehensive sense has been rising considerably. The discussion has been held at various levels, from farmers themselves to environmental activists and politicians. Unfortunately, however, the topic of food security has become a vehicle for political debate that seems often removed far from any real solution to the problems. Thus, the present study will be narrowed down to EU documents, in particular to soft law acts, which may play a significant role in the integration of law order. Soft law instruments assume a variety of forms and may be completely non-binding and yet produce specific effects<sup>2</sup>. Although the problem is a global issue, it is because of the events of recent years that it has more strongly manifested itself in the consciousness of the people of Europe. In the 'farm-to-fork' strategy, food security was referenced in a very clear way unprecedented to date in EU documents<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Food security definition

The definition of "food security" is still being worked on. This concept has been constantly evolving and has been studied across various disciplines, including law and public policy. The discussion on global food issues began in the time of the global food crisis in the mid-1970s, during which the focus was primarily on the food supply. The main question then was how to ensure the availability and price stability of food at both national and international levels. The whole process of international negotiation was finalised at the World Food

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1 J.H.J Cribb, J.H.J. *Food Security: What Are the Priorities?* Food Security, 3(2), 2011 123-125. DOI: [10.1007/s12571-011-0129-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-011-0129-0).

2 SF. Terpan, *Soft Law in the European Union- The Changing Nature of EU Law*, European Law Journal, 1/2015, pp.70.

3 S. Henneberry, C. Carrasco, *Food Security Issues: Concepts and the Role of Emerging Markets [in:] Food Security in an Uncertain World*, ed. A. Schmitz, P.L. Kennedy, T.G. Schmitz, Emerald UK 2015, pp 63-76.

Conference of 1974 and resulted in a set of institutional arrangements pertinent to information and promotion of food security. It was in that very conference that the food security concept was first defined to mean: ‘availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices’<sup>4</sup>. In 1983, the Food and Agriculture Organization expanded the notion of food security by implying that ‘ensuring food security means that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need’<sup>5</sup>.

The concept of food security has been redefined multiple times. In 1986, after the release of the World Bank report entitled “Poverty and Hunger”, the authors proposed a new definition. They distinguished between chronic food security, which is linked to ongoing poverty, and transitory food insecurity, which results from sudden natural disasters, economic collapse, or conflicts<sup>6</sup>. The definition of food security proposed later on at the World Food Summit (1996) has probably become the most well-known one: „Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels, achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”<sup>7</sup>. Despite the ratification of universal definitions, which were meant to curb the development of new definitions, the terms have continued to diverge due to the multifaceted nature of the concepts<sup>8</sup>.

Over time, the definition of food security has evolved to reflect the intricate factors that impact an individual, community, or nation’s ability to meet their dietary needs sustainably and equitably. According to the FAO<sup>9</sup>, the four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Food availability refers to the physical presence of sufficient quantities of food at both the national and household levels. It involves considerations of agricultural production, distribution systems, and the capacity to import or export food to meet demand. Access to food is influenced by various economic and social factors that determine an individual’s or community’s ability to obtain food. These factors include income levels, market access, social safety nexus, and the absence of discrimination or barriers that may hinder equitable food distribution. Utilisation, on the other hand, focuses on the nutritional quality and safety of the food supply. It takes account of factors such as proper storage, preparation, and consumption practices, as well as access to clean water and sanitation, which are crucial for maximising the nutritional benefits of the available food. To achieve food security, ensure consistent access to nutritious food, it is of vital importance to maintain stability in said dimensions over time and to build resilience against natural risks and human-made shocks, such as climate-related events or economic crises.

In 2020, the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) for the Committee on World Food Security<sup>10</sup> recommended

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4 United Nations. Report of the World Food Conference, Rome 1974.

5 *World Food Security: A Reappraisal of the Concepts and Approaches*, Report FAO 1983, retrieved 10 January 2024, [pb\\_issue2\\_final.indd \(fao.org\)](#)

6 E. Clay, *Food security: concepts and measurement*, retrieved 10 January 2024, [www.fao.org](#).

7 Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action, Rome 1996.

8 M.Rachel Sumsion, M. Haylie . June and Michael R. Cope, *Measuring Food Insecurity: The Problem with Semantics*, *Foods* 2023, no.12, pp.11.

9 An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security, [al936e00.pdf \(fao.org\)](#).

10 “*Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030*” Report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome (2020).

adding agency and sustainability to the underlying pillars. Agency refers to the capability of making individual or collective decisions related to producing and consuming food. Sustainability encompasses the ability of food systems to maintain food security while preserving the needs of future generations. As authors of the HLPE reports indicated in the article<sup>11</sup>, with the growing awareness of the sustainability implications of current food systems and with the widening gaps in the food system, the significance of both agency and sustainability has become increasingly apparent. Hence, it seems extremely vital now to formally adopt a six-dimensional framework for food security policy that would incorporate both agency and sustainability along with the other four dimensions, rather than just mention such trends in high-level policy documents.

The modern concept of food security as an inherent part of a broader term of ‘human security’<sup>12</sup> generated a set of specific rights derived from other human rights<sup>13</sup>. The concept of human security prioritizes the well-being of individuals over the interests of states. Its primary objective is to broaden the scope of security beyond national security, compelling states to prioritize the welfare of their citizens. By using the term “security,” it aims to urge governments to recognize that the security of their citizens directly impacts the overall security of the state<sup>14</sup>. The human right to sufficient food is consistent with the imperative goals of eradicating hunger and guaranteeing food security for all. The right to food has been categorised as part of the second generation of human rights, which also includes social, economic, and cultural rights. Proclamations of the right to food appeared in a number of national constitutions and international treaties<sup>15</sup>. The following should be underlined here: Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>16</sup>; The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights highlighted the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food<sup>17</sup>. Also, worth mentioning are instruments that advance the human rights of specific groups, e.g. the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>18</sup> and Art. 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>19</sup>. Said resolutions placed special emphasis on the commitment of the states to such cooperation that would aim at the reduction of food insecurity. The state is obligated to ensure that the right to food is respected, protected, and realised, just as it is with other human rights<sup>20</sup>. As it was directly underlined in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food<sup>21</sup>, human rights are interconnected,

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11 J. Clapp, W. Moseley, B. Burlingame, P. Termine, (2021). *Viewpoint: The case for a six-dimensional food security framework*. Food Policy, 106, 102164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2021.102164>.

12 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined human security as both “safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression” and “protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life.” United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], Human Development Report 1994, at 23 (1994).

13 B. Wernaart, *The plural wells of the right to food*, [in:] *Governing food security. Law, politics and the right to food*, ed. O. Hospes, I. Hadiprayitno, Wageningen 2010, pp.49.

14 Howard-Hassmann, Rhoda E. “Human Security: Undermining Human Rights?” *Human Rights Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2012): 88–112. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41345472>.

15 See: L. Knuth, M. Vidar, *Constitutional and Legal Protection of the Right to Food around the World*, FAO 2011, <https://www.fao.org/right-to-food/resources/resources-detail/en/c/80544/>, retrieved February 2024.

16 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

17 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/).

18 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

19 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

20 P. Alston, *International Law and the Right to Food*, [in:] *Food as Human Right*, ed. A.Eide, W. Barth Eide, S. Goonatilake, J. Gussow and Omawale, The United Nations University, pp. 169.

21 Critical perspective on food systems, food crises and the future of the right to food, Human Rights Council Forty-third session 24 February–20 March 2020.

indivisible, and interdependent. As a result, the enjoyment of other human rights, including health, education, and life, may be adversely affected when the right to food is violated, and conversely<sup>22</sup>. Food security and international security intersect on the grounds of access to water, energy and farmland. The issue of food security is closely linked to an access to other strategic goods, as seen in Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. The conflict has led to the exclusion of many fields from cultivation in Ukraine, impacting the availability of food in other countries<sup>23</sup>.

### 3. The European Union level

At the European Union level, the food security issue seems to have attracted much political attention in recent years. Many concerns about food security have been raised in debates across the EU over the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as over the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Undoubtedly, it is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that is deemed to be the principal area where action needs to be taken to achieve the underlying goals. Since its inception, the CAP has aimed at increasing agricultural productivity in order to provide consumers with a steady supply of food at affordable price, concurrently ensuring an adequate standard of living for farmers. What is seen as a hallmark of the policy is that every couple of years, it has undergone significant evolutionary modifications. The new agricultural policy is supposed to be fairer, greener, more animal-friendly, and more flexible<sup>24</sup>. The main objectives of the policy listed in Art. 39 TFUE are to enhance agricultural productivity, ensuring that consumers have access to a consistent supply of reasonably priced food, and to guarantee that farmers in the EU can earn a fair livelihood. The CAP has been constantly adjusted in order to address the challenges of the current era. However, upon reading the aforementioned article, one will not find any direct reference to food security. This article outlines the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which are closely related to ensuring food security. Although the initial objectives of the CAP that were established in the 1958 Treaty of Rome have not been formally revised in any of the subsequent EU treaties, food security has not been given much importance in the various reforms since its inception. Moreover, although the CAP was introduced in 1962 to ensure European food provision, this objective has often been overlooked in the policy implementations<sup>25</sup>.

In the field of food security on the EU level some, mainly soft law acts<sup>26</sup>, have been introduced. With the initiation of the green transition in the European Union, a complex discourse emerged, which encompassed the subject of food security as well. The European Green Deal is a package of policy initiatives, which aims

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22 The Right to Food, FAO Fact Sheet No.34. p.5, retrieved 15 December 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>.

23 K. Marzęda-Młynarska, *Food security and international security: Tracing the links*, Atheneum, vol. 79(3)/2023, pp. 70–89

24 Communication of the Commission, 25.06.2021 r., *Political agreement on new Common Agricultural Policy: fairer, greener, more flexible*, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_2711](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_2711).

25 Jeroen J.L. Candel, Gerard E. Breeman, Sabina J. Stiller, Catrien J.A.M. Termeer, *Disentangling the consensus frame of food security: The case of the EU Common Agricultural Policy reform debate*, Food Policy

Volume 44, February 2014, Pages 47-58.

26 The White Paper on „Adapting to climate change: Towards a European Framework for action”, the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on „EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges”, European Parliament Resolution of 27 September 2011 on „EU policy framework to assist developing countries in addressing food security challenges”, the European Parliament Resolution of 30 April 2015 on „Milano Expo 2015: Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”, the European Parliament Draft Resolution of 4 May 2016 on the next steps towards attaining global goals and EU commitments on nutrition and food security in the world, the European Parliament report on the Future of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 (2009/2236 (INI)).

to set the EU on the path to a green transition, with the ultimate goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050. The Green Deal is designed to help implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Development Implementation Goals. The main idea pertains to the transformation of the EU economy with a sustainable future in mind. Among the elements of the Green Deal, there are also such that envisage the creation of a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system. The Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) is at the center of the Green Deal, comprehensively addressing the challenges of sustainable food systems, and recognizing the inextricable links between healthy people, societies, and the planet. The European Commission has announced the Farm to Fork strategy<sup>27</sup> which is a growth strategy aimed at prioritizing sustainability, inclusivity, health, nature conservation, and economic growth. F2F has set a significant milestone as the initial endeavour to formulate a comprehensive food policy in Europe. The strategy comprises seven areas of focus, with sustainability underpinning each of such areas. Sustainability is the guiding principle of the proposed modifications, which affect the food chain, food production, food industry practices, and consumer behaviour. In accordance with the schedule appended to the communication, the overarching goals are to be realised via the execution of more precise objectives. The specific objectives are: to ensure sustainable food production; to stimulate sustainable food processing practices; wholesale and retail; hospitality and catering; to promote sustainable food consumption; to reduce food loss and food waste; and to combat food adulteration. The communication also included a point on food security. The Commission noted that the sustainability of food systems is affected by various types of crises, be they political, economic, environmental, or health related. Food systems are impacted by a variety of factors, including supply chain disruptions, labour shortages, the loss of certain markets, and shifting consumption patterns. Further compounding this are the ramifications of a climate change and the unique circumstances faced by agri-food workers. The Commission has established a connection between food security and social protection, biodiversity, and the working conditions of agri-food sector employees in F2F strategy. Additionally, the Commission has declared the development of a food crisis response mechanism.

While the establishment of a sustainable food system in the EU is the focal point of the F2F strategy, the European Commission did not prioritise food security in its communication of 2020. However, new acts aligning with the F2F strategy have been published, with food security occupying the top spot. In 2021, the COVID-19 crisis served as a wake-up call for the EU, highlighting potential food security risks. In response to this crisis and the associated risks, the European Commission announced a communication: 'A contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis'<sup>28</sup>. What draws attention after reading the EC's document is the statement that ensuring food supply and security is an objective outlined in Article 39 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. As mentioned earlier, Article 39 TFEU fails to directly refer to food security, as defined by the World Food Summit. Notwithstanding, the conclusions presented in the communication subsequent to the post-COVID-19 crisis undeniably enhance the comprehension of contemporary European food security. After the COVID-19 crisis, the EC has introduced a new narrative in which the scenario of food crises affecting the EU proves much more real and underlines a strong necessity to devise a reliable and workable food security contingency plan. It was understood that the Covid crisis served as a wake-up call, demonstrating the need to be prepared for additional unpredictable crises.

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27 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, COM/2020/381 final.

28 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis, COM(2021) 689 final, Brussels, 12.11.2021.

In that very communication, the establishment of the Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response mechanism, which will be devised by a (new) dedicated group of experts composed of Member States' representatives, competent non-EU- countries and stakeholders' organisations, was announced. In the event of an emergency or crisis, a panel of experts may be assembled promptly and as frequently as necessary to facilitate discussions and coordinated actions among those responsible for crisis management. Such mechanism will be activated when exceptional, unforeseeable, and large-scale events or risks, whether originating from within or outside the food supply chain, show the potential to endanger the EU's food supply or security, impacting multiple Member States and necessitating EU-level cooperation. In the conclusion, the Commission placed special emphasis on the need to unceasingly increase the awareness of vulnerabilities and risks, to mitigate the latter to the greatest extent possible, and to establish and maintain a procedural capacity for a swift, coordinated, and cooperative response grounded in a combination of EU policies that empower crisis management tools and bolster system resilience.

The other crisis, resulting from Russia's aggression on Ukrainian territory, is significantly more serious in terms of food security. Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe. The war has caused a sharp decline in grain exports from Ukraine, one of the world's top exporters. In consequence, millions of people worldwide now have a grave cause for serious concern about their food security. Grain production in Ukraine between 2022 and 2023 is estimated to have declined by 29%<sup>29</sup>. The communication termed Safeguarding Food Security and Reinforcing the Resilience of Food Systems<sup>30</sup> was a response to the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine. The invasion could carry severe repercussions for global food security, in both Ukraine and many food-deficit countries across the African region (including Sub-Saharan Africa), the Middle East, and the Western Balkans. This, combined with the already rising food prices, is very likely to worsen poverty and instability in the foregoing countries. Ensuring food security is closely linked with access to other strategically important resources, a connection that was clearly illustrated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Key resources such as land, energy, and water are essential for producing food at a scale that guarantees both its physical availability and economic accessibility. The ongoing conflict has rendered many agricultural fields in Ukraine unusable, negatively impacting food availability in other countries. Additionally, the war has led to a sharp rise in energy prices, particularly oil and gas, which has increased food production costs (such as fuel and fertilizers) and, consequently, food prices, thereby reducing economic access to food. The Commission's communication initially focused on global food security and the well-being of the Ukrainian people as it detailed the actualities of the conflict that ensued from Ukraine. The Commission, among other things, pledged in its communication to ensure that flexible access is maintained and facilitated in EU markets, having regard for imports and exports from Ukrainian markets. This commitment holds significant relevance when considering the 2024 prospects and perspective.

The European Commission has highlighted that the EU is mostly self-sufficient in terms of essential agricultural products<sup>31</sup> however, recent events involving the invasion of Ukraine and the surge in commodity prices have been contributing to a noticeable uptick in prices across agricultural and seafood markets. Said fluctuations have exposed the vulnerabilities of the EU's food system, specifically our dependence on

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29 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/how-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-has-further-aggravated-the-global-food-crisis/>, retrieved February 2024.

30 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems, Brussels, 23.3.2022, COM(2022) 133 final.

31 Communication, point 3.1

imported resources such as energy, fertilisers, and animal feed. Consequently, producers are facing inflated expenses that eventually trickle down to the cost of food, raising concerns about consumer purchasing power and producer income. What is very important is the fact that EU food availability is not at stake here. It is food affordability for low-income persons that takes precedence.

To mitigate the effects of the new crisis, interim measures have been recommended by the Commission, the first one being financial support for farmers. Substantially vital, in accordance with the F2F, should be the prioritisation of financial assistance to farmers who implement sustainable practices, with particular attention paid to the sectors and farmers that have been hit the hardest by the crisis. Additionally, the Commission has passed a law permitting Member States to deviate from specific greening obligations<sup>32</sup>, which is in direct opposition to the goals of the F2F strategy. In its communication, the Commission pointed out that the current crisis has exposed the EU food system's heavy reliance on imported inputs such as fossil fuels, fertilisers, feed, and raw materials, thereby confirming the need for a fundamental reorientation of EU agriculture and food systems towards sustainability, in line with the Green Deal and a reformed CAP.

#### 4. The future of F2F

Given the current ongoing crises, the objectives outlined in the F2F strategy may prove to be quite difficult to attain. The Commission's suggested alteration to agricultural policy has incited strong emotions since its announcement, even prior to the commencement of the war. It is a challenging undertaking to balance the interests of various groups, such as food producers and consumers. Manufacturers have expressed their concerns about the scope and speed of the proposed changes. Some contend<sup>33</sup> that enacting the reforms proposed in the strategy could lead to a reduction in agricultural output. Moreover, constraints on the use of pesticides, fertilisers, and antibiotics may cause production to shift outside the EU, resulting in increased costs. On the other side of the debate, environmental NGOs praise the strategy as being the first ever cross-cutting policy initiative in the history of the EU to tackle the entire food chain to transition to a true fair and environmentally friendly food system.

Unfortunately, shortly after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the EU Commission lifted the greening requirements under pressure from certain parts of the European Parliament and the Council. The EU Commission granted Member States a derogation<sup>34</sup> to allow the use of fallow land for crop production without forgoing the "greening payments" from the Common Agricultural Policy. One year later, the EU Commission's figures revealed that 21 Member States had taken advantage of the suspension of greening requirements. They converted an average of 40% of their Ecological Focus Areas (EFA) into production and made the use of all pesticides (plant protection products) possible<sup>35</sup>.

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32 Draft Commission Implementing Regulation providing for derogations from Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the application of the standards for good agricultural and environmental conditions of land (GAEC standards) 7 and 8 for claim year 2023.

33 M. Tyszka, *Co myślą organizacje rolnicze o przyjęciu przez PE strategii "Od „ola do stołu"?*, retrieved 15 January 2024, <https://www.farmer.pl/produkcja-roslinna/ochrona-roslin/co-mysla-organizacje-rolnicze-o-przyjeciu-przez-pe-strategii-od-pola-do-stolu,112229.html>.

34 Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/484, of 23 March 2022, providing for derogations from Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and from Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 639/2014 as regards the implementation of certain conditions relating to the greening payment for claim year 2022.

35 [https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/230523\\_MediaBriefing\\_EFA-derogations\\_EN.pdf](https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/230523_MediaBriefing_EFA-derogations_EN.pdf).



The strategy's deviations, purportedly implemented to ensure food security, have elicited negative responses from the scientific community. Making a demand under the One Earth umbrella was one noteworthy action. In the document published in April 2022: *We need a food system transformation—In the face of the Russia-Ukraine war*<sup>36</sup>, now more than ever, authors have underlined that: *'European food security is not under threat as a consequence of the Russia-Ukraine war. Rather, Europe is threatened by a longstanding crisis of unhealthy diets with the consumption of refined grains and animal products.'* The authors also proposed three principles that can contribute to a sustainable food system in Europe: accelerating the transition to healthier diets with fewer animal products in Europe; increasing production of legumes and strengthen the Farm2Fork initiative; reducing food waste.

In the same vein, Mark Driscoll in policy briefing for the WWF<sup>37</sup> pointed out: *'Rolling back the F2F strategy to scale up intensive systems of food production would not solve the current pressures on the global food supply - instead, it would move us even further away from a food system that is resilient to future shocks. The F2F strategy offers a unique opportunity to promote joined up policies that result in synergies for food security, production, sustainability, and health - it must not be weakened or abandoned.'* One of the most important targets of F2F was a legislative framework for sustainable food systems (FSFS) which aims to accelerate and facilitate the transition to sustainable systems. European Commission announced that FSFS will be ready before the end of year 2023. The European Commission had provided a preliminary impact assessment and a public consultation was open from 28 April 2022 to 21 July 2022. A total of 2 670 responses were submitted mainly by citizens (77%). A large majority of respondents (92%) agree that the EU's food systems should become more sustainable and believe that for this to happen, a concrete action is required mainly from public authorities (90%)<sup>38</sup>. FSFS was the EU's flagship project. However, the work on it slowed down or it even dropped out of the agenda. It is becoming increasingly difficult at times to maintain the course set out in the Farm to Fork strategy.

The beginning of 2024 has seen protests from farmers across Europe, highlighting the challenges faced in creating a new contract between farmers and society. This new contract should prioritize rewarding farmers for the environmental and climate benefits they provide to compensate for any losses they may suffer in the transitional period to a more sustainable farming practice. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has a pivotal role to play in supporting the transition to a more secure and resilient EU food system built on sustainable production and consumption. More than two-thirds of the strategy is likely to remain unfinished before a new commission takes office in November 2024, with legislation still under discussion by lawmakers. Out of the 31 actions pledged under the Farm to Fork initiative, 15 have yet to be initiated. Additionally, a controversial proposal regarding pesticides was withdrawn by the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. This decision comes at a time of increasing opposition towards the European Green Deal from right-wing groups, and at a time of widespread protests from disgruntled farmers. Among their concerns, farmers have voiced frustration over the burdensome nature of environmental regulations. Yet recent developments raise doubts regarding the status of the 2020 strategy, and commission officials have become more evasive about its

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36 Pörtner, L. M., Lambrecht, N., Springmann, M., Bodirsky, B. L., Gaupp, F., Freund, F., Lotze-Campen, H., & Gabrysch, S. (2022). *We need a food system transformation—In the face of the Russia-Ukraine war, now more than ever*. *One Earth*, 5(5), 470-472. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2022.04.004>.

37 M. Driscoll, *Farm to Fork: Systemic Change is Key to European Food Security and Resilience Accelerating the transition to Sustainable Farming and Healthy Diets*, WWF, May 2023.

38 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-european-green-deal/file-sustainable-eu-food-system>.

future<sup>39</sup>. While the F2F strategy is still officially in place, it seems that its final form will deviate from the original plan. One of the issues with the strategy was that it was initially developed by the Directorate for Health and Food Safety (DG Sante) instead of the Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Development ( DG Agri). In 2024, following a series of farmer protests, the Parliament proposed a revision of the Green Deal. The revision of F2F was then entrusted to DG Agri, which is expected to have a better grasp of farmers' requirements.

It seems that the misinterpretation of the term “food security” may have influenced a shift in the Commission’s ambitious plans. The term has frequently been misused to justify intensifying production methods, which in turn undermines both the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, as well as the resultant legislative initiatives. There is a considerable risk that including an undefined principle of food security could once again be used to reduce the ambition and impact of the FSFS in terms of environmental, climate, and health goals. This can be avoided only if the term is clearly defined in a way that directly supports the objectives of the FSFS<sup>40</sup>.

At the time the Farm to Fork strategy was announced, it seemed that we were facing a historic change in the approach to food production in the European Union. Subsequent geopolitical crises undermined the confidence and determination to drive change to promote the FSFS concept. Fearmongering entered the public discourse, this time using the concepts of food insecurity. Meanwhile, it is the original assumptions of F2F that are likely to bring us closer to greater food security. A successful transition to a more sustainable food system is in the interest of European consumers, farmers and businesses. The shift in food production and the resulting contribution to climate change mitigation can benefit primary producers, the environment, the economy and society as a whole by providing sustainable, safe, sufficient, affordable, healthy and nutrient-rich food.

To summarise, the F2F strategy aligns with the fundamental pillars that support the notion of food security, as each of its assumptions does. Availability, access to food, utilisation, stability, agency, and sustainability are all crucial to be equally viewed in any consideration of food security. An unambiguous and full understanding of the definition is fundamental in triggering any discussion or action driven by the topic. Although all facets of food security are addressed in EU documents, they are frequently not adequately approached and reviewed in the course of formulating policies. The Farm to Fork Strategy affords the European Union a substantial opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the realm of food security by means of sustainable food production. The F2F strategy was designed to provide a holistic attitude to the food system, with its potential success being globally unprecedented. By transforming the approach to food production, distribution, and consumption, it aimed to revolutionize the concept of food security. Shifting focus from consistent production levels to redefining the production model could have a substantial impact on food security.

Although we cannot speak of the spectacular success of F2F, it is important to approach the future with optimism. The failures in implementing the strategy have provided valuable lessons for the future. It is worth mentioning an initiative that originated from the F2F conglomerate. On September 4, 2024, the

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39 G. Fortuna, Over half of von der Leyen’s food policy promises weren’t met. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/02/19/over-half-of-von-der-leyen-food-policy-promises-werent-met-analysis-shows>.

40 G. Kolpak, G. Lisi Lorenzo, F. Madalina Popirtaru, M. Rice, Q. Marchais, *The EU legislative framework for a sustainable food system How can it effectively deliver for the environment and people?* Client Earth, September 2023, p.9.

Strategic Dialogue for the Future of Agriculture<sup>41</sup> was released. This document presents a shared vision and recommendations for the future of EU food and farming. The report emphasizes the crucial role of food and agricultural production in European society and security, highlighting the significance of the diversity within European food and farming as a valuable asset. In this regard, it represents a continuation of the F2F approach.

In summary, it can be confidently stated that the innovative F2F strategy has sparked extensive discussions on a holistic perspective of food production and consumption. Furthermore, it has enhanced our understanding of food security. Any shortcomings and limitations have the potential to be addressed within the framework of the European Commission's 'Vision for Agriculture and Food', which is expected to be unveiled within the first 100 days of President von der Leyen's second term.



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41 "Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture: A shared prospect for farming and food in Europe", [Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture \(europa.eu\)](#).



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