POSITION PAPER

More than just a stakeholder perspective: Health should define livestock resilience in post-2027 CAP

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The European Commission has published the new EU Livestock Strategy[1]. Together with the EU Protein Plan[2], it sets the direction for future public support. By public support, we mean the full range of policy instruments through which the EU incentivises the agri-food sector—from subsidies and investment support to financial instruments, promotion schemes and other support mechanisms.

The purpose of public support is to deliver public value, and health—understood through a One Health approach as the protection and promotion of human, animal and environmental health—is one of the public values against which agri-food policies, including the new EU Livestock Strategy, should be judged. **The Livestock Strategy may not itself distribute payments, but it will influence what kinds of livestock production EU policy funds**, promotes and supports, and according to which principles, including through the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)[3].

Health is the criterion, not a nice-to-have

For public support, health should be one of the objectives against which all others—including the very strategic ones such as resilience, competitiveness and sustainability—are judged. ***The starting question should therefore be: what are resilience, competitiveness and sustainability ultimately for?***

The Commission's point of departure for the Strategy is the struggle that livestock farmers face in keeping the sector profitable[4]. From there, it recognises real problems faced by farmers today, including increasing disease risks, environmental pressure and animal welfare concerns. These are essential, **but the Strategy will fall short of delivering on long-term resilience unless it explicitly recognises and advances human health**

[1] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/eu-livestock-strategy_en
[2] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/crop-productions-and-plant-based-products/cereals/reducing-plant-protein-deficit-eu_en
[3] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Section 3, p. 4.
[4] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Section 2.1, pp. 3–4.

alongside animal and environmental health using the One Health approach.

On paper, the Livestock Strategy does not appear to be a health policy. However, in practice, the choices it makes will inevitably affect health across populations, particularly those in vulnerable situations—by influencing the conditions in which animals are raised, how animal welfare reforms move forward, how disease risks are managed and prevented, how antibiotics are used, how food safety rules are applied, and how animal proteins are promoted and supported. Livestock production also affects health through its wider environmental footprint, with consequences to human, animals and ecosystem health. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) brings all three together within a single policy challenge, making it one of the clearest examples of why a health framing is important.

By failing to recognise these wider health impacts, the Strategy disregards a well-established body of scientific evidence[5][6][7].

Health needs to be a defining objective, not a nice-to-have. The Livestock Strategy does contain useful provisions on disease-prevention, animal welfare, and sustainability[8]. These elements have the potential to contribute to better public health outcomes, but the Strategy's understanding of resilience remains largely centred on the competitiveness and profitability. Instead, **health should define livestock resilience**. In other words, a livestock sector should not be considered resilient if its continued competitiveness depends on production conditions that undermine human, animal or environmental health. From EPHA's perspective, this is the criterion against which the Strategy—and the public support used to implement it—should be judged.

Resilience begins by reducing disease pressure at its source

AMR is one of the clearest demonstrations of why competitiveness, resilience, environmental protection and public health must be addressed together. **AMR is recognised globally as one of the major threats to human and animal health, food security and economic stability**, and the EU has committed to addressing it through a One Health approach since 2017. **Yet despite this, the Strategy still does not make AMR and advancing One Health explicit indicators**, objectives or conditions for support[9].

[5] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(25)00627-0/fulltext
[6] https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/1637779/
[7] https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)31788-4/abstract
[8] European Commission (2026). Annex to the EU Strategy on Livestock, Actions 3–8.
[9] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Section 1 (pp. 1–3) and Section 3 (pp. 4–19).

Resilience should reduce disease pressure. The Strategy recognises disease prevention as one of the priorities, which is a good start. But it falls short in how it defines prevention. Here, prevention is largely framed in terms of outbreak control, monitoring, and vaccination[10]. This is a problem; resilience begins by reducing disease pressure at its source. **A truly resilient livestock sector therefore should not only respond to disease outbreaks, but also to reduce underlying dependence on antimicrobials through healthier production systems.**

The danger of locking in high-risk production models

Some livestock production systems place a much greater burden on health and the environment than others. Public support should therefore progressively favour production associated with lower health and environmental impacts. **Yet under the new Strategy, public support remains available to indoor, large-scale and high-density systems**, with policy focused on mitigating their impacts rather than shifting support toward lower-impact production[11].

This matters because the environmental consequences of livestock production are also health consequences. The Intensive livestock production will generate air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and nutrient pollution that affect human, animal and ecosystem health[12]. Together with odour and noise, these environmental pressures are experienced most acutely by communities living close to intensive livestock production facilities.

If public investment continues to support models characterised by high antimicrobial dependence while exposing nearby communities to harmful air pollution the resilience of the sector is not fundamentally transformed. The Strategy's support for innovation, competitiveness, efficiency and financing can strengthen the sector[13], but without clear public health and environmental safeguards they also risk reinforcing intensive production models characterised by poor animal health, high antimicrobial use and greater environmental pressure. **In the long term, these conditions undermine not only health, but also weaken the very competitiveness, efficiency and resilience the Strategy seeks to strengthen.**

Public value places limits on simplification

[10] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Section 3.1, pp. 5–8.
[11] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Section 3.1, pp. 5–8.
[12] Concentrated animal production and manure management practices are significant sources of ammonia emissions, which contribute to the formation of secondary fine particulate matter (PM2.5), alongside greenhouse gas emissions, including methane and nitrous oxide. Excessive nutrient loading from livestock waste can degrade soils, contaminate water bodies and accelerate biodiversity degradation.
[13] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Sections 3.1 and 3.2, pp. 7–10.

Reducing unnecessary administrative burden can benefit farmers, but simplification must not become deregulation by another name.

The current emphasis on simplification[14] [15] should also prompt some institutional memory. Europe's experience with **mad cow disease** (BSE)[16] shows what can happen when livestock rules are treated primarily through the lens of efficiency and market functioning, rather than precaution, public health and One Health. The lesson is not that rules should never change, but that safeguards in livestock systems exist for a reason. **There should be no simplification at the expense of public health, animal welfare, biodiversity, water quality or the climate.** If simplification weakens the protections that prevent animal-health crises, food-safety failures or wider public-health risks, it does not make the system more resilient or more competitive.

The EU Livestock Strategy: A step forward, but not far enough

The EU Livestock Strategy contains several positive elements, particularly on disease prevention, animal welfare and sustainability. But it stops short of making health a defining objective of livestock resilience. Therefore, implementation now matters.

The guiding principle is as simple as that: public support exists to deliver public value. No promotion scheme, funding instrument, simplification agenda or policy measure should come at the expense of health, clean air and water, environmental and social sustainability, equity, and public trust. Public support for livestock should strengthen the sector by improving animal health and welfare, protecting food safety, and supporting healthy diets—for people, animals and the environment alike.

The next window: The post-2027 CAP

The Strategy has now been adopted. The next opportunity to strengthen its health dimension lies in implementation through the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and other funding, financing and promotion instruments[17]. This is particularly timely because the Commission's five-year review of Member States' AMR Action Plans found inconsistent implementation around prevention, environmental drivers, monitoring and

[14] European Commission (2026). EU Strategy on Livestock, Section 3.2, p. 10.
[15] European Commission (2026). Annex to the EU Strategy on Livestock, Commission Key Actions, Action 14.
[16] In the late 1970s and early 1980s, changes in livestock production and rendering practices placed greater weight on efficiency and cost reduction, while contaminated animal protein continued to circulate through cattle feed. BSE was first recognised in the United Kingdom in 1986, and by the 1990s it had developed into a major animal-health, public-health and political crisis that forced Europe to strengthen its food-safety rules and precautionary approach (http://efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/bovine-spongiform-encephalopathy-bse).
[17] European Commission (2026). Annex to the EU Strategy on Livestock, Commission Key Actions, Actions 2, 9, 15–22 and 31.

cross-sector coordination, and the ten-year evaluation of the EU Action Plan will take place in 2027.

This brings us back to where we started. **This implementation should be guided by a simple principle: public support should deliver public value**, not only sectoral performance.

The post-2027 CAP and related instruments should translate this principle into three concrete priorities:

- **Prioritise health-promoting farming and food production through investment and promotion policies** as a foundation for long-term competitiveness and environmental and social resilience—not only short-term market competitiveness.

- **Embed AMR stewardship in the disease-prevention agenda.** Disease prevention should focus on healthier production systems that reduce underlying dependence on antimicrobials.

- **Apply health safeguards across investment, simplification and promotion** to ensure public support incentivises production models that reduce underlying dependence on antimicrobials. This would help to avoid preventable health risks, healthcare costs and additional strain on health systems.