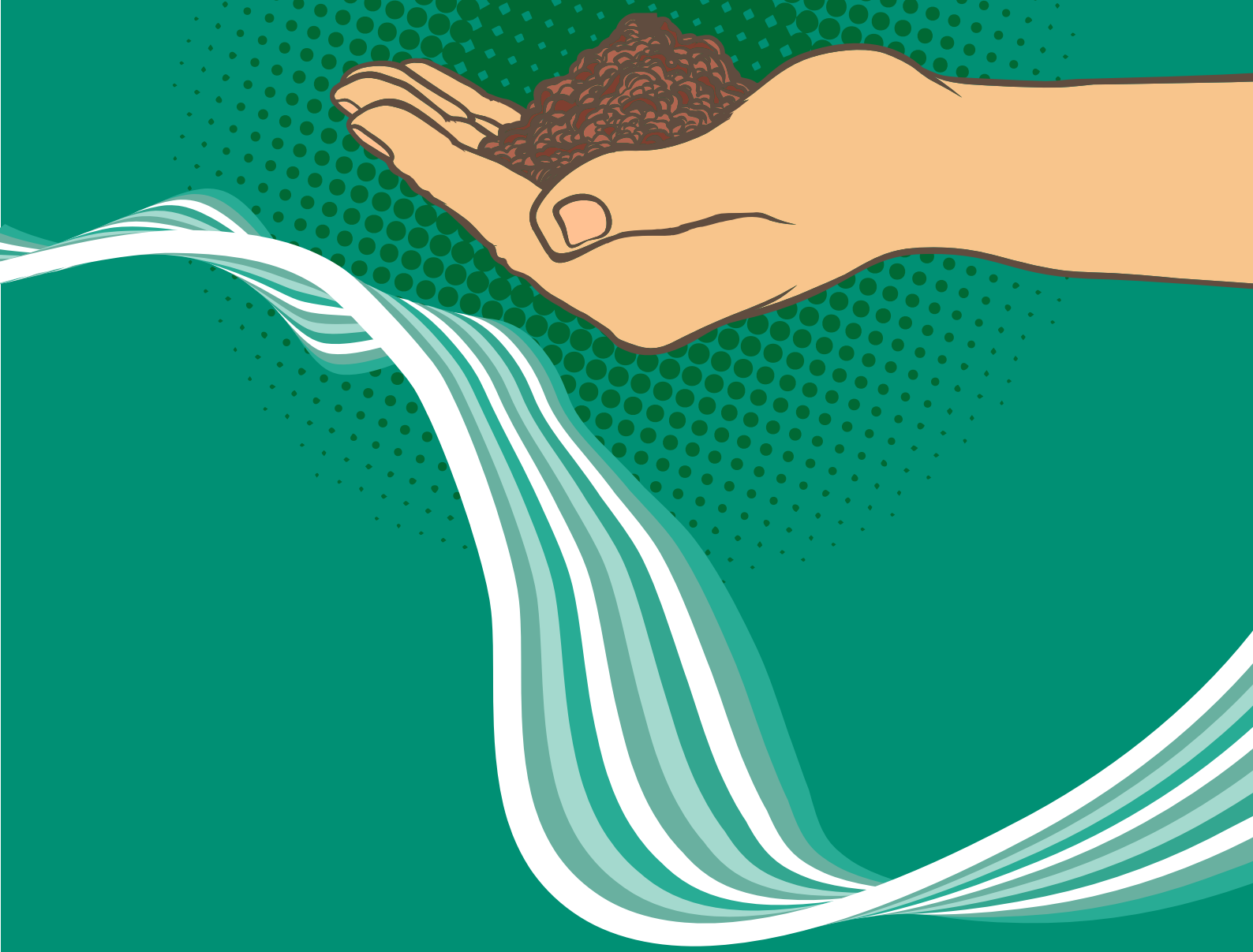
european public health alliance

CAP: 11 WAYS TO DELIVER FOR BETTER HEALTH



About the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)

EPHA is a change agent
Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health.

We are a dynamic member-led organisation made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals and disease groups, working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe.

EPHA (AISBL) is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD). EPHA sits on various EU-level platforms, including the EU Multi-Stakeholder Platform on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the DG AGRI Civil Dialogue Groups and the Forum for a Better Functioning Food Supply Chain.

EPHA's Transparency register number is 18941013532-08

As part of its objective to advance a healthy and sustainable food system, EPHA works to reinvent the EU's common agricultural policy.

A CAP for Better Health

The reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a major opportunity to improve people's health. The CAP is set to distribute €365 billion during its next seven-year period. Such large-scale funding can, and should, be directed towards supporting public health.

Health is a core value for Europeans. Across Europe, health and social security is now the second most important national concern. Two thirds of citizens want to see more EU action on health. Providing safe, healthy and quality food is considered a main priority for the CAP.

At the same time, more than half a million people under the age of 65 die of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the EU each year. Nearly 10% of the EU's GDP is spent on healthcare. Agriculture is the main source of our food, a basic human need. However, the current food system also creates many health risks, and many of the costs to our healthcare systems can be prevented by sensible food and agricultural policies.

Health is not just the absence of disease, but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. The EU has a strong commitment to advance public health. The Union exists to promote "the well-being of its peoples"[1], and is mandated to ensure a "high level of human health protection" in the definition and implementation of all its policies[2]. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a compass to promote well-being both within and outside the EU.

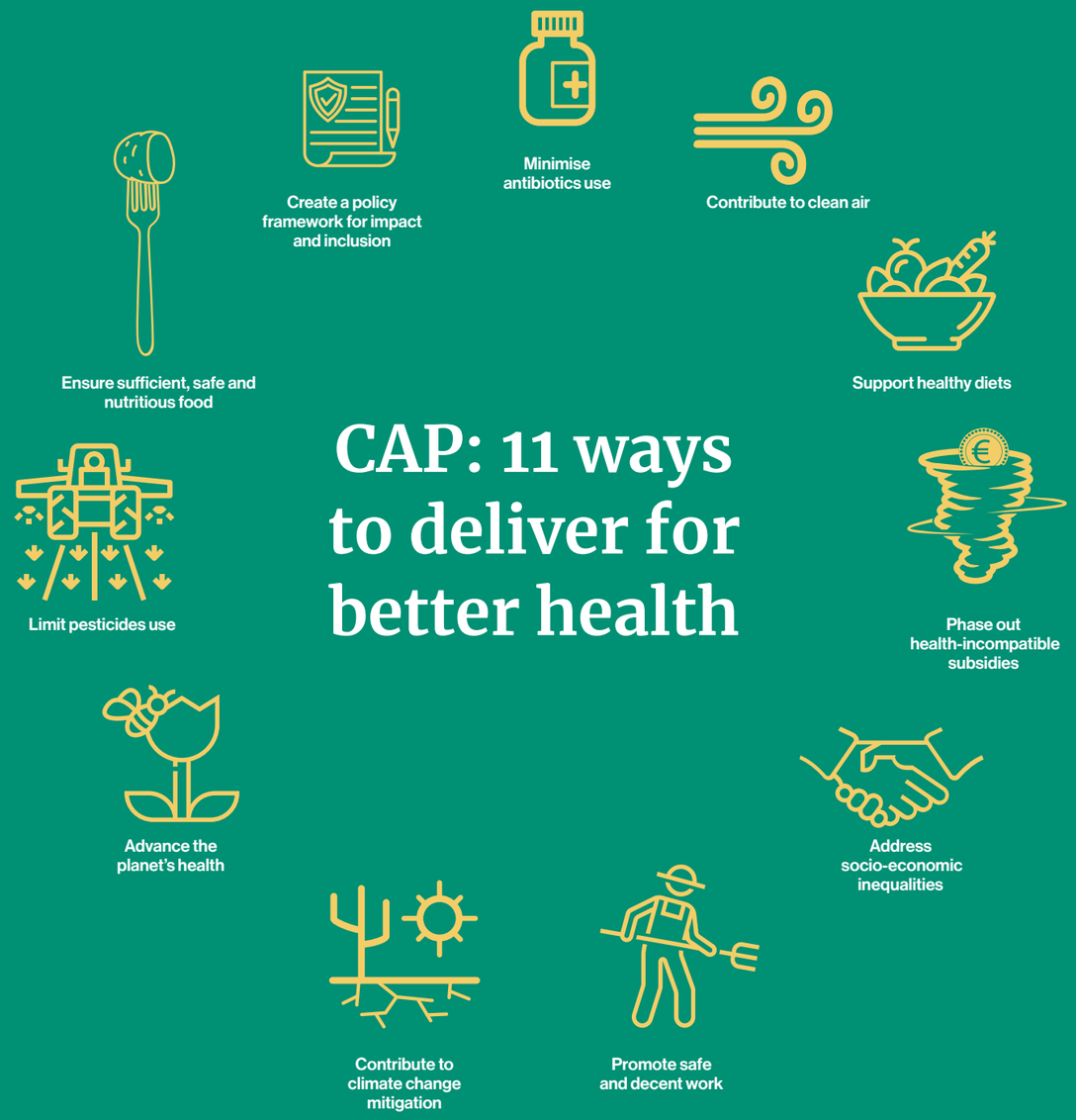
A 'performance-oriented' approach for the CAP, if well-designed and implemented, could help deliver on health and other societal challenges. Health deserves to be an explicit CAP objective. At the same time, many of the policy's other objectives can also deliver significant health co-benefits if ambitiously pursued.

Drawing on the links between public health and agriculture, this briefing identifies 11 main ways in which the CAP can leverage change for better health. The briefing aims to encourage the development of credible, meaningful and comprehensive policy responses to realise European agriculture's potential to act as a force for healthy living.

For a more specific discussion on policy options, consult the extended version of this briefing at: www.epha.org/CAP4Health.

1 Article 3(1) Treaty on European Union

2 Article 168 (1) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union



CAP: 11 ways to deliver for better health

1. Minimise antibiotics use

High and persistent levels of antibiotics use in animal farming contributes to the spread of drug resistant bacteria, or antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Drug resistance implies that common infections and routine surgeries could become life-threatening, putting in peril the last century's advances in healthcare. AMR is currently responsible for well over 25.000 annual deaths in the EU and may kill some 10 million people per year globally by 2050.

CAP funds should support farmers in transitioning to low-antibiotics use, high animal welfare farming models guided by ambitious and time-bound national antibiotics use reduction targets.

2. Contribute to clean air

Agriculture accounts for over 90% of the EU's ammonia emissions. Ammonia is an air pollutant and plays a major role in the formation of Particulate Matter (PM), which is responsible for up to 400.000 premature deaths per year in the EU. According to estimates, emissions from agriculture are a leading contribution to PM formation in Europe.

CAP funds should support effective ammonia emissions reduction strategies and offer incentives to pursue more ambitious national reduction targets than those existing under current EU rules.

3. Support healthy diets

Eating well is a precondition for good health. Paradoxically, unhealthy diets are one of the main risk factors for the EU's entire burden of ill-health today. Over half the European population is overweight or obese. Dietary patterns are shaped by 'food and drink environments' – the collective physical, economic, and socio-cultural surroundings that affect what we eat. The creation of healthier food environments is an important health objective to which the CAP can contribute.

The CAP should increase funding for existing instruments, such as the distribution of fruit and vegetables in schools, and integrate new measures that stimulate both demand and supply of foods for healthy and sustainable diets, including through the creation of markets for such products and by fostering social innovation in food supply chains. It should adopt the World Health Organization consumption target of at least 400 grams of fruit and vegetables per day.

4. Phase out health-incompatible subsidies

Using public money efficiently implies the need to maximise the co-benefits from this investment, while phasing out support for activities which burden our healthcare systems. Certain products originating from agriculture, such as tobacco and alcoholic beverages, like wine, are associated with the main risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs account for the vast majority of deaths and diseases in the EU and amount to approximately €700 billion per year in healthcare costs.

The CAP should divert funding from products and activities that are inconsistent with public health objectives, while offering producers incentives to diversify into other types of production. In particular, public funding for wine promotion should be phased out.

5. Address socio-economic inequalities

Socio-economic conditions are major determinants of health. Policies which help raise incomes and reduce the risk of social exclusion are likely to promote better health and avoid diseases. Farming is not a low-income sector in most EU countries, but significant inequalities exist, with especially smaller farms and those in 'less favoured areas' earning the lowest incomes. Pockets of rural poverty persist.

The CAP should target payments equitably to farmers who face specific socio-economic challenges, within the framework of a wider policy strategy to support fair producer prices. Programmes to improve the socio-economic fabric of rural areas should be pursued, including those enhancing access to health and social services, and promoting local employment.

6. Promote safe and decent work

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations in Europe. Risks include accidents, falls, injuries and contacts with animals, including zoonoses. Conditions linked to exposure from pesticides have been recognised as occupational diseases. Many farm workers report poor levels of work-related health. Reports describe exploitative labour conditions in different European regions.

CAP funding should ensure effective and independent farm advisory services to ensure that farmers and agricultural workers have the knowledge and tools to prevent occupational risks. Observance of adequate labour and social standards for agricultural workers should be a precondition for funding.

7. Contribute to climate change mitigation

Agriculture, especially animal farming, drives climate change. Climate change is expected to result in systemic changes in ecological conditions and social dynamics with far-reaching effects on people's health. Occurrences such as heat waves, floods, storms, water shortages, changes in socio-economic status and migration are predicted to negatively affect a wide variety of health outcomes.

CAP funds should be dedicated to pursue effective, evidence-based and systemic strategies to reduce agriculture's climate impact and enhance its mitigation potential, including through the setting of time-bound national methane emissions reduction targets.

8. Advance the planet's health

Trends such as biodiversity loss, soil degradation, nitrogen and phosphorus overload, chemicals pollution and water depletion threaten the earth's ecological and biophysical systems which support human progress. Pollinators, vital for both food and nutrition security, are under severe pressure. Occupying over 40% of EU's land area, today agriculture is a main driver of ecosystem degradation.

CAP funds should be progressively earmarked to reward farmers who adopt farming practices and interventions which contribute to ecosystem restoration, within the framework of time-bound and specific targets on environment and biodiversity.

9. Limit pesticides use

The intensive use of pesticides in agriculture has led to widespread exposure to agrochemicals. There are mounting concerns about the impacts of low-dose exposure to pesticides, notably their endocrine-disrupting effects. The costs associated with pesticides use and the considerable potential for reduction add to the pressures to limit their use.

CAP funds should ensure farmers can make a secure and well-informed transition towards farming practices and models that limit the use of pesticides, in the framework of time-bound national reduction targets.

10. Ensure sufficient, safe and nutritious food

Access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food is a basic human need. Climate change and soil degradation may affect regional production capacity in Europe. Food-borne infections, with over 4.500 outbreaks reported in the EU in 2016, remain a concern. The nutritional value of food can be influenced by agricultural decisions, including through the choice of animal feed, crop variety and farming methods.

CAP funding should incentivise the uptake of soil conservation practices and climate-resilient farming methods. It should stimulate food production and supply chains that deliver safe, diverse and nutritionally valuable foods, with due regard to the need to prevent food waste.

11. Create a policy framework for impact and inclusion

The CAP needs a policy design that effectively links public money to the delivery of EU-wide public goods. In view of agriculture's multiple impacts, it is necessary to include stakeholders from different sectors, including health, to ensure effective policy design and implementation.

The CAP should provide an effective delivery model aimed at transitioning towards a healthy and sustainable food system, including through appropriate objectives and targets, future-oriented funding tools and a common European vision. Public health stakeholders should be meaningfully included in the design and monitoring of the CAP.

In other words, a CAP for healthy and sustainable diets

Sustainable diets, or 'sustainable healthy diets', refer to eating and drinking patterns "with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations"[3].

The 11 objectives above, taken together as a package, highlight how the CAP can contribute to more healthy and sustainable diets[4].

Considering the food system's substantial impact on our societies, a transition towards healthy and sustainable patterns of production and consumption is not a question of luxury, but of necessity. The simultaneous pursuit of multiple objectives, inherent in such transition, will at times involve accepting trade-offs. However, it also provides the opportunity to benefit from key synergies.

A shift towards more plant-rich diets, with higher consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, pulses, berries and nuts, 'fewer but better' animal products and lower energy intake, together with a lower use of alcohol, is increasingly recognised as a key strategy for a sustainable future, able to yield major co-benefits for our economy, climate, biodiversity, food and nutrition security and health.

However, we must look beyond the CAP to truly capitalise on the synergies from such a transition, and adequately manage the trade-offs. The pursuit of coherence across those policies that shape our food and agricultural system, including notably trade, guided by a 'food policy' for Europe is therefore the next frontier to be crossed.

In this light, strategic planning can be a stepping stone towards a more comprehensive, coherent and inclusive form of policy-making.

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3 UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) & Bioversity International (2010) Sustainable Diets and Biodiversity. FAO

4 Above objectives cover the six main dimensions of the sustainable diets definition: health, environment, economy, social values, quality and governance, as identified in: Mason & Lang (2017) Sustainable Diets. How Ecological Nutrition Can Transform Consumption and the Food System. Routledge

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