

# Will German farming be greener under a new EU farm policy?

[European Environmental Bureau](#) & [Germanwatch](#), 18 June 2021

## Overview

A €270 billion new 5 year Common Agricultural Policy will likely be agreed in a closed meeting between negotiators for the EU commission, parliament and national ministers on 25 June, or during the weekend. Talks [collapsed](#) in May, with environment a central area of disagreement. Formalisation of deals negotiated between EU institutions are usually a formality. Ministers may rubber stamp the new farm deal when they [meet](#) on 28 June.

Agriculture is the [single largest](#) cause of collapsing wildlife populations in Europe. A rare sector able to trap atmospheric carbon emissions, it is also currently a [major contributor](#) to global heating. All sides claim the new policy will do more for the environment. But NGOs say [little will change](#), with most money will continue going to the [most polluting](#) farms.

On 10 June, the Bundestag voted through a law to guide EU farm spending in Germany. This could help small farms and organic farms, but there is no action on climate, with livestock, the most polluting sector, facing no pressure to change. The situation is unlikely to change after September's national elections unless Greens take control of the national agriculture ministry. Slow progress on farming reform will threaten Germany's ability to meet legally binding climate (see [page 15](#)) and clean water targets, as well as a national goal to [halt](#) all biodiversity loss.

## German domestic plans

Significant control of EU farm budget spending is shifting from Brussels to member capitals. The EU Commission must approve German national spending plans, but oversight will be weak. Like other member states, Germany usually presents weak environmental ambition in the EU farm policy as progress, then waters that ambition down further during national implementation.

The Bundestag on 10 June voted through a law to guide EU farm budget spending. It has to be published, but has changed little from an earlier draft (see [here](#), notably [here](#)). Much of the detail has been left to further legislation under the new government following September's elections.

Under most of the likely scenarios, the law will steer German farming slightly in the right direction, from a sector causing major climate, biodiversity, water pollution, soil degradation and antibiotic resistance problems in Germany to one causing slightly less harm. The policy will not deliver the serious change scientists say is needed and, in general, farming will likely remain highly destructive.

Proportionately more subsidies will go to smaller, typically less intensive, less polluting farms. This is good but not an environmental game-changer. A shift to Rural Development type spending will likely boost support for organic farmers, supporting a national target of 20% of farmland being certified organic by 2030. But the remaining majority of farms will likely see only small positive changes, in a best case scenario for the environment.

Germany will spend [up to] a quarter of its EU farm budget on eco-schemes. The law [describes](#) some schemes, but others can be added later. Which schemes will get what portion of the budget, as well as how much farmers will have to change their work to get payment and how serious the improvements will be for the environment is all to be decided in further national legislation. We predict schemes will favour a reduction in pesticide use rather than increased space for natural habitat. Increased crop rotation is likely, helping to stabilise collapsing wildlife populations and declining soil infertility. But the law will do nothing to help Germany meet its target to reduce farm-related climate emissions by 20% on 1990 levels by 2030, a major missed opportunity. Less meat = less heat. Three quarters of climate emissions from farms comes from livestock, when animal feed is included. Yet there are no incentives to reduce livestock numbers. Water pollution from manure will remain high. We believe the intensive farm lobby convinced conservative politicians to prevent change.

## Germany's role at EU level

Despite Germany's political strength, its farm minister Julia Klöckner claims it cannot be more ambitious on environmental farming goals than the Council of Ministers as a whole. Germany concluded the Council's [position](#) during its EU presidency period. Days before Germany stepped into its presidency role, the European Commission published its sustainable farming manifesto, the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#). Instead of using this as the basis to raise ambition, the German presidency saw fit to add to its negotiating position a warning (article 106) to the European Commission not to use the Green Deal as a benchmark for judging national spending plans for the EU farm budget. Council has consistently been the least ambitious EU institution during negotiations. Despite all this, Ms Klöckner claims the environment is at the heart of the position she concluded ([one](#), [two](#)). In general, her public statements on environmental ambition have been vague, aimed at pleasing all sides. She has fought most for minimum spending on so-called [eco scheme] payments. These appear green, but reduced oversight rules and major loopholes could mean that large amounts of 'eco' funding goes to polluting, intensive farms.

German MEPs dominate the European Parliament's negotiating team. Peter Jahr (EPP) is the lead rapporteur. He is [reported](#) to have received €111,000.00 in EU farm payments in 2019. The Greens criticise him as having conceded more quickly to Council on environment aspects than any other area during negotiations. Norbert Lins (EPP) played a powerful role shaping parliament's negotiating [position](#) as chair of its agriculture committee. Despite recently positioning themselves as defenders of green ambition, both were central in finalising parliament's negotiating position, which NGOs dubbed a ['stinking deal'](#).

## Contacts

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