

Will French farming be greener under a new EU farm policy?

[European Environmental Bureau](#), [France Nature Environnement](#) - 21 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 are expected to 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 continuing to go to the [most polluting](#), intensive farms.

French spending plans reveal a largely status quo position. Deliberately weak conditions mean funds for environmental measures will flow to conventional farms without securing real environmental benefits. At the same time, support for organic farming will be slashed. Such slow progress threatens France's goal of [halting](#) biodiversity loss by 2030, its stratégie nationale bas carbone, and its Ecophyto plan for pesticide reduction. Environmental and organic farmers protests have been seen in [Brussels](#) and [France](#).

French domestic plans

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

France has published key parts of its [spending arbitrations](#). Organic, environmental organisations and smallholders [walked out](#) of the government's public consultation process in protest.

France is planning to largely maintain the status quo. It will not go beyond the low level of ambition agreed at European level and will not deliver the serious change scientists say is needed, not contribute to the government's high-profile goal of shifting to agroecological farming, and in general, farming will likely remain highly destructive.

The intensive farming lobby has [described](#) Julien Denormandie as a "good spokesman" and this seems to be evident in France's spending plan. He wants to weaken support to organic farmers by opening the main source of public funding for organic farmers to so-called High Environmental Value farms, despite ministers being [warned](#) their environmental benefits are

unproven. Organic farmers [say](#) this will slash their support by 66%. Targets to boost the amount of organic farmland in France are set at a modest 18%, despite an EU Green Deal target of 25%.

France could transfer up to 25% of direct farm support payments (Pillar 1) to the more environmentally friendly rural development (Pillar 2), but chose an uninspiring 7.53% shift which is the status quo.

There will be more public money going to crop insurance. Green groups consider this a false solution to [growing](#) farm losses tied to global heating, saying the money should go to helping farmers build resilience instead.

France's role at EU level

Mr Denormandie talks up green ambition, regularly mentioning the environment in [speeches](#). In reality, he has been a leading voice in driving a [race to the bottom](#), notably his last interventions in Council in which he vocally called to further lower environmental spending and green conditions. Council is consistently the least environmentally ambitious of the three EU institutions.

Mr Denormandie has called on Council to lower the floor on Ecoregime (Pillar 1) spending to 15% from the European Commission's already low proposal of 20%. France is a leading voice in arguing to allow large amounts of income support payments to remote and less productive areas (Pillar 2) to count as environmental funding, when it has few real green benefits.

He has argued most vigorously against moves to encourage crop rotation in support of monocultures, particularly of maize. The Commission proposal, backed by Parliament, would reduce insecticide use and improve soil health. But Denormandie led opposition in Council, raising the issue on every occasion and far more than any other minister. France has large corn monocultures, mainly to feed livestock, including for its foie gras industry.

In the European Parliament, En Marche MEPs have defended the new EU farm policy as environmentally progressive, while NGOs dubbed parliament's position as a ['stinking deal'](#). Pascal Canfin chairs the environment committee, a large and powerful group and parliament's second most important voice on farming. His arguments do [not impress](#) environmentalists.

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