

1. Main Messages

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must prioritise sustainability while ensuring economic viability for farmers. Stakeholder opinions on CAP's effectiveness in supporting sustainability remain divided.

Greening efforts within the CAP face challenges related to enforcement, administrative burden, and policy coherence. Weak implementation undermines environmental objectives.

The CAP must align more effectively with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global trade frameworks to enhance sustainability in agriculture.

There is strong variation in stakeholder perspectives across Member States, **with farmers often prioritising economic stability over sustainability while policymakers and academics advocate for stricter environmental standards.**

A food systems approach is needed to integrate sustainability, trade, and agricultural policies, ensuring coherence across EU and national-level interventions.

2. Research Scope & Methodology

This study analyses stakeholder perspectives on CAP and its sustainability impact, using:

- **Q methodology to categorise stakeholder perspectives**, revealing five key factors shaping opinions.
- **Survey responses from 118 stakeholders** across multiple EU countries (Hungary, Poland, Finland, Germany, Italy).
- **Factor analysis to group respondents** into distinct viewpoints on CAP's sustainability, trade, and economic dimensions.
- **Comparative analysis of stakeholder views** on CAP's role in food security, environmental protection, and international trade.

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ENHANCING THE SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP)



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3. Key Findings: Evidence Supporting Policy Discussions

3.1. Stakeholder Perspectives on CAP Sustainability Goals

- **Stakeholders are divided into five distinct groups**, ranging from strong sustainability advocates to sceptics who prioritise economic concerns.
- **Farmers and trade-oriented stakeholders express concerns over CAP greening policies**, fearing they reduce competitiveness and increase costs.
- **Environmental policymakers and researchers support a stronger sustainability focus**, arguing for stricter enforcement and greater alignment with the Green Deal.

Implication: Policy reforms should balance economic and environmental objectives to ensure broad stakeholder buy-in.

3.2. CAP Greening and Policy Coherence Challenges

- **Weak enforcement of sustainability measures undermines CAP's environmental impact**, leading to scepticism among stakeholders.
- **The CAP's complexity creates an administrative burden for farmers**, making compliance with sustainability standards difficult.
- **Lack of policy coherence** between CAP, EU trade policy, and environmental regulations **reduces the effectiveness of sustainability measures**.

Implication: Improving enforcement mechanisms and reducing administrative complexity can enhance CAP's sustainability effectiveness.

3.3. Diverging Views on CAP's Role in Trade and Food Security

- **Some stakeholders argue that CAP should focus primarily on food security and economic stability**, especially in the context of geopolitical crises (e.g. war in Ukraine).
- **Others advocate for stronger sustainability measures within CAP**, pushing for stricter environmental standards and increased climate resilience.
- **Trade-related concerns persist**, with stakeholders debating whether high EU sustainability standards create a competitive disadvantage globally.

Implication: Future CAP reforms must balance food security priorities with sustainability objectives.



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4. Implications for EU Policy & Trade Governance

- **Ensure CAP aligns more closely** with the Green Deal and SDGs by enhancing the Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F 2.0).
- **Introduce stricter enforcement mechanisms** to prevent greenwashing in CAP compliance.
- **Enhance monitoring and reporting** on CAP sustainability outcomes.
- **Streamline sustainability compliance requirements** to make them more farmer-friendly.
- **Increase technical and financial support** for farmers adopting sustainable practices.
- **Improve communication of CAP sustainability benefits** to increase farmer engagement.
- **Improve coordination between DGs** (e.g., DG AGRI, DG TRADE, DG ENV) to ensure consistency.
- **Increase international collaboration on sustainability standards** to reduce trade barriers for EU farmers.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the need for greater policy coherence and stronger enforcement of sustainability measures within CAP.

Key takeaways:

- **Stakeholder views on CAP sustainability are highly polarised**, requiring a balanced policy approach.
- **Stronger enforcement mechanisms are needed** to improve CAP's environmental effectiveness.
- **CAP reform must integrate sustainability** without compromising economic stability for farmers.

This Project Brief is based on **Deliverable 6.3.** of the TRADE4SD project.

Trade4SD is a 4-year project devoted to research on a topic which is high on the domestic as well as multilateral, EU and bilateral trade policy agenda. The ambition of the project is to explore and foster the positive linkages between trade and sustainable development is to provide policy recommendations for the creation of new opportunities for agents involved in the global, regional and national agri-food value chains, and to define conditions for sustainable livelihoods of farm producers in the EU and developing partner countries. Trade is a central factor in shaping global, regional and local development. Increased trade, empowered by the growth of Global Value Chains (GVCs), has boosted productivity and incomes in many countries.



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