



Council of Ministers of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

“Can the EU reassert its position as an agricultural power in order to ensure food sovereignty?”

SUMMARY:

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Introduction:

EU's food sovereignty has repeatedly been challenged, which sparked a number of policies, councils, different approaches and reforms through the years, meant to ensure this sovereignty.

However, recent challenges questioned this sovereignty, which appears to have been troubled by mondialisation, by evergrowing imports for multiple fields, ranging from actual food to fertilizers.

Agricultural power is closely linked to food sovereignty, since agriculture is the starting point of most if not all food, and it is by definition local. As a result, a change in EU's agricultural power would affect EU's food sovereignty, which is why agriculture has and will be at the centre of the debates; "Can the EU reassert its position as an agricultural power in order to ensure food sovereignty".

Agriculture and Fisheries Council configuration (AGRIFISH)

The Agriculture and Fisheries Council adopts legislation in a number of areas relating to the **production of food, rural development and the management of fisheries**.

How does the Agriculture and Fisheries Council work?

The AGRIFISH Council **brings together ministers from each EU member state**. Most member states are represented by a single minister for both sectors, although some send two ministers - one for agriculture and another for fisheries.

The European Commissioner for **agriculture and rural development**, the European Commissioner for **health and food safety**, or the European Commissioner for **maritime affairs and fisheries** also take part in meetings.

Meetings usually take place once a month.

About agriculture and fisheries policy

The Council adopts legislation, in most cases together with the European Parliament, in a number of areas relating to the **production of food, rural development and the management of fisheries**.

Areas under agricultural policy include the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, rules on the **internal market for agriculture, forestry, organic production, quality of production and food and animal feed safety**. Measures relating to CAP aim to **increase agricultural productivity, ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, stabilize markets, assure the availability of supplies and ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices**.

The Council also adopts **legislation on fisheries policy**, the setting of annual Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and quotas for each species, and on the allocation of fishing opportunities. A key challenge is to make fisheries more environmentally sustainable and more economically viable, while addressing issues such as overfishing and fleet overcapacity.

Example:

In France, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty (MASA, thus renamed since the appointment of the Borne government on May 20, 2022) is the **administration responsible for agricultural, fisheries, food and forestry policy. It also organizes teaching and research in these fields**.

The Minister of Agriculture participates in particular in the development and implementation of the common agricultural policy of the European Union, with his European counterparts. Because farming professions are close to the environment, the Ministry of Agriculture is also heavily involved in France's national sustainable development strategy.

Historical recap

- 1962: The birth of the CAP

Following the devastation of World War II, Europe took decisive steps towards a peaceful and united future.

To restore the social and economic fabric, the six founding countries of what was then the European Communities began talks on a **common approach to agriculture**. The farming sector played a significant role in the post-war European economy yet it was characterised by:

- low food production, in part because of the war
- income for farmers that was much lower than in other sectors
- the need to provide easy access to food and raise productivity
- non-harmonised national farming policies, leading to differences in competition conditions

In 1962, the CAP was introduced with the following **aims**:

- increasing agricultural productivity
- ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers
- guaranteeing the availability of supplies
- stabilising the markets
- establishing a secure supply chain with reasonable prices
- harmonising competition rules across all countries

To achieve these goals, an economic system of price and market support was put in place. This mechanism provided farmers with a guaranteed price for their products, introduced tariffs on external products and introduced state intervention in case market prices fell. Farmers received support according to their total levels of production.

1970: The Mansholt plan: modernisation

Sicco Mansholt proposed a **wide-scale modernisation** of the agricultural sector in an attempt to improve the standard of living of farmers and avoid market distortions.

The Mansholt plan, the first reform of the CAP, aimed to:

- optimise the area of land under cultivation
- merge farms to create larger units

1984: Supply management, aligned production with market needs

To prevent excessive drops in farmers' income, in 1984 the EU introduced a **quota system** for products such as milk to limit overproduction and manage supplies. At the same time, there was growing pressure from external actors that accused the European Communities of over-protectionism and called for the liberalisation of the market.

1992: The MacSharry reforms: from market support to producer support

In 1992 the first large-scale reform of the CAP was adopted, the aim of which was to reduce the overall budget and move away from unlimited guaranteed prices. The policy shifted from a market support system to **direct income support** for farmers, and included new obligations for farmers to protect the **environment** and incentives to improve **food quality**.

1999: Adding rural development

After almost 40 years, the CAP's budget still amounted to almost 50% of the total EU budget, while the agricultural sector provided fewer possibilities for creating new jobs than other sectors on the rise, particularly the services sector.

2013: The first reform under the ordinary legislative procedure

The new millennium brought new challenges for the CAP. Not only did it need to ensure a well-fed and thriving society, it also had to respond to new concerns such as climate change, animal welfare, food safety and the sustainable use of natural resources.

The 2013 reform tried to address these demands by including:

- **greening** of payments, making agriculture more sustainable
- more **equal distribution** of support, limiting the budget for big farms
- additional support for **smaller farms** through better targeting of income support
- incentives for **young people** to embark on a career in farming

In addition, the reform brought about a boost in spending on rural development projects.

This was the first time that a CAP reform was carried out under the ordinary legislative procedure, introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, where the Council co-legislates with the European Parliament on an equal footing.

- Click here: [Reform of the common agricultural policy post 2013 \(archive\)](#)

2021: A fairer, greener and more result-oriented policy

[What is new in the EU's common agricultural policy?](#)

The post-2020 reform of the CAP aims to introduce a new strategic approach, giving member states the autonomy to put together **strategic plans** based on their needs and in line with EU-wide goals. This means that measures at national level can be better targeted to local specificities without undermining the overall 'common' nature of the policy.

In a context of growing public concern about climate change and environmental challenges, the new CAP places a special focus on green requirements. Funding, as before, is made conditional on compliance with EU environmental and climate laws. In addition, the reform introduces various rewards for greener practices, both as part of the direct payments (with a new type of support for green measures, the '**eco-schemes**') and under rural development.

In addition, smaller farms and young farmers are considered priority recipients of direct payments. For the first time, the CAP also includes a commitment to protecting **workers' rights**.

- Click here: [Common agricultural policy 2023-2027 \(background information\)](#)

Political contextualisation

Commission communication on safeguarding food security

The Commission presented its communication of 23 March 2022 on safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems, which sets out a number of measures aimed at **addressing the impact of the war in Ukraine on food security**, both in the EU and worldwide.

On the whole ministers welcomed the communication as well as the measures put in place to support farmers, which had been discussed at the March Council meeting. They agreed that, thanks to the common agricultural policy (CAP), **food supply in the EU is not at risk**.

Many member states highlighted the importance of providing **food aid and other assistance to Ukraine** and of **maintaining**, both within the European market and internationally, the **free flow of trade in agricultural products** to support regions affected by the reduction of Russian and Ukrainian exports.

Ministers also endorsed the package of **measures introduced by the Commission** to continue to safeguard food security in the EU, including market measures under the CAP, **capacity within the framework of the CAP to mobilise set-aside areas** to increase production, and a temporary crisis framework for State aid. During the discussion, the Croatian delegation, supported by others, shared information about the need for further temporary measures to support farms and ensure food security.

Strengthening global food security

Many ministers further insisted on the need to strengthen the resilience of the sector by reducing its dependence on inputs and enhancing innovation, saying that this required the development of a long-term strategy.

Food security in war-torn Ukraine is of great concern, particularly in besieged cities, with Russia seemingly deliberately targeting and destroying food storage locations.

The Commission is supporting Ukraine in developing and implementing a short and medium term food security strategy to ensure that inputs reach farms where possible, and that transportation and storage facilities are maintained to enable Ukraine to feed its citizens and to eventually regain its export markets.

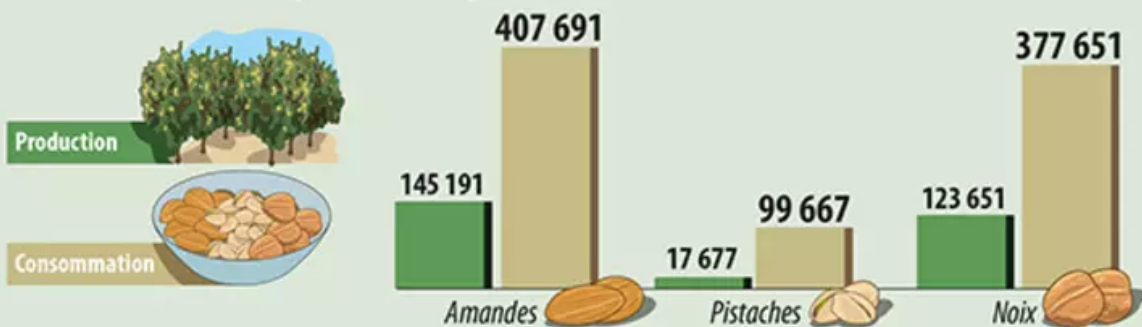
An EU Emergency Support Programme of €330 million for Ukraine will help to secure access to basic goods and services, as well as the protection of the population.

L'Europe, grand importateur de fruits à coque

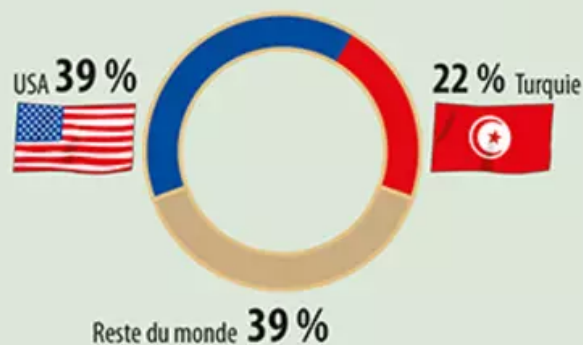
Données 2020

En tonnes équivalent coquille

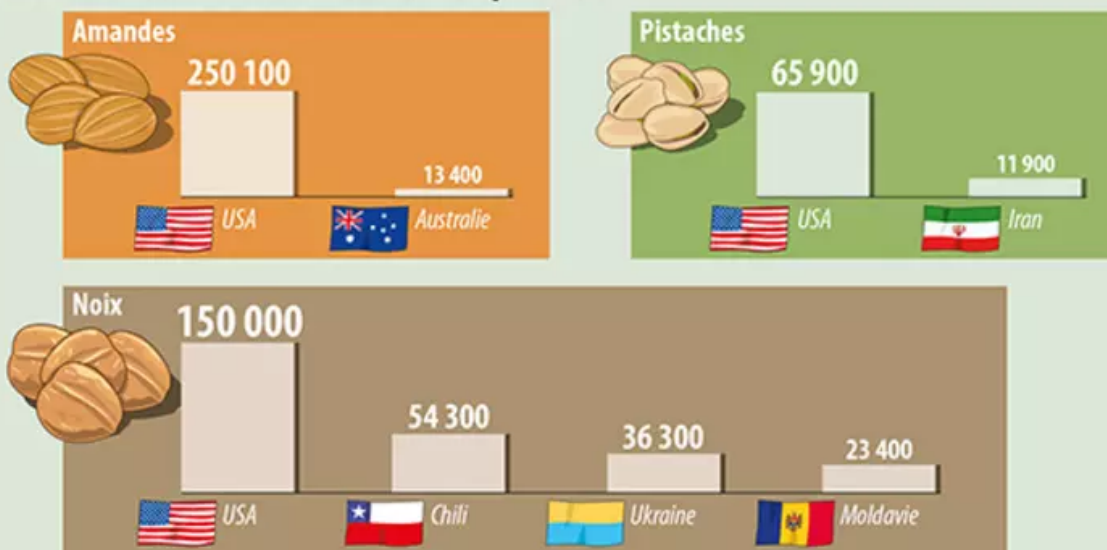
► Une consommation supérieure à la production



► Les États-Unis, premier fournisseur de fruits à coque de l'UE



► Domination des États-Unis sur tous les produits

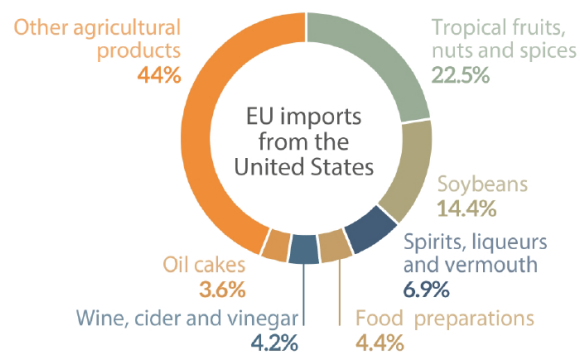
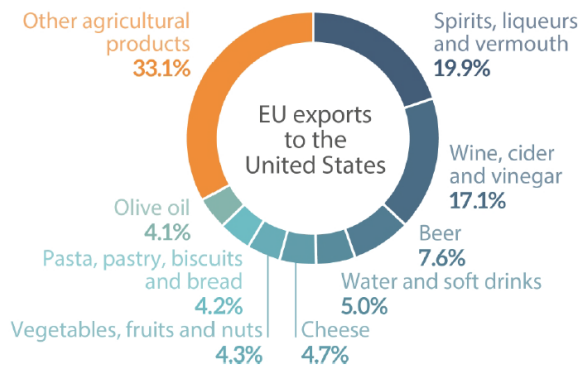
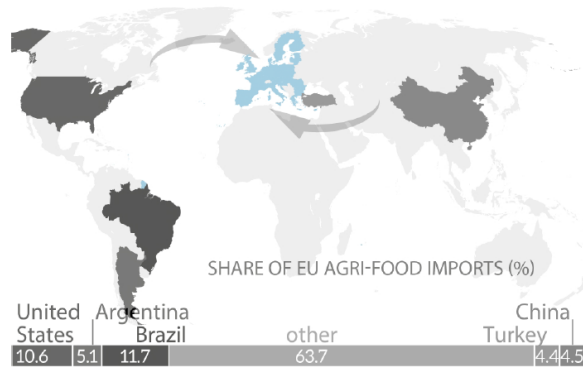


2. Agri-food imports and exports

Main importers of EU agri-food products



Main exporters of agri-food products to the EU



Position of Member States on the Issue

The European Union (EU) and the United States (USA) are the world's largest agricultural producers and consumers. The EU is one of the major trade partners for the USA, but also a serious competitor in the international market. Nevertheless, according to the Eurostat, in 2019, in the EU, 22.6% of the rural population was living at risk of poverty in relation to 22% in cities, while in the USA the poverty ratios were 13.3% and 10%, respectively. Food security and people's well-being are strongly related. Reliable and safe food production, processing, distribution, storage and preparation are crucial elements of food security, as is equitable allocation of food among people. More than a decade before the 1996 World Food Conference, in 1974, both Western and Eastern Europe had achieved sufficient food supplies to ensure an adequate diet for all citizens. Unfortunately, problems of poverty and relative food insecurity persist among vulnerable populations throughout Europe, especially in southern Europe and, increasingly, in certain countries in transition.

Here are some interesting information about each country and its agricultural relevance:

- Spain is known for its dry climate. Farmers must irrigate and therefore must use a lot of water to grow a crop.
- Spain and Italy produce 54% of the supply of olive oil and are among the top three wine producers worldwide. They also lead in pear production.
- The country with the highest agricultural surface area of Western Europe is France with 48.2 million acres or 35.5% of its total area. France is also the second-largest

exporter of goods to the United States and the largest agricultural producer in Europe.

- Switzerland must import much of its food because it lacks a favorable climate and soils for agriculture. Its timber industry is also weak because of air pollution and acid rain damage.
- Germany imports over one-third of its food because of the country's focus on industry.
- Germany and Spain, however, are the leading producers of barley in the whole world.
- Iceland is the leading producer of cod. Over 70% of the world's exports of this fish come from this country.
- Sweden is nearly self-sufficient in food products. It is also the leading producer of mink fur and timber products. Along with Finland, they produce more oats than any other nation.
- In the Czech Republic, the number of people involved in agriculture has decreased from 90% of the population to merely 5% since the fall of communism. Nearly 40% of the land, however, remains cultivated for production.
- Up to 50 percent of the farms in Austria are under 25 acres, and yet the country remains self-sufficient in food.
- Poland is the leading agricultural nation in Eastern Europe, but it cannot produce enough food to feed its people. This is because the farms are small and irregularly shaped which limits investment in large equipment and fertilizer. Nineteen percent of their workforce is directly involved in agriculture.
- Belarus suffered a disastrous 10% reduction in arable land in 1986 when the Chernobyl nuclear disaster contaminated the soil and water in the southern portion of the country. Which forced the country to increase their importation rate.
- Yugoslavia does not export any food or natural resources. Its people rely on self-subsistence agriculture. This means that each family must grow everything which provides them with food or clothing. While it means they are self-sufficient, it also limits their exportation income and, therefore, their ability to be an agricultural power.
- Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey have a large percent of their workforce involved in agriculture, 36%, 27%, 18% and 46% respectively.
- The United States is the richest agricultural nation in the world. Nineteen percent of the nation is cultivated farmland. The U.S. is not only self-sufficient but the largest exporter of goods. The nation is the largest producer of corn, soybeans, sorghum and a major producer of sugarcane, potatoes, peanuts, sugar beets, wheat, oats, citrus, hogs, fruit, tobacco, beef, and fish. The average size of a farm in the U.S. is 434 acres. Only two-percent of the gross domestic product comes from agriculture

and only 1.9% of Americans are involved in production agriculture, although 17% of Americans' jobs are influenced by agriculture.

Table 1. Utilized agricultural area (UAA), labor inputs and capital inputs in the agriculture of the EU and the USA in 2017.

Countries	UAA ^a		Employment		Capital Input (Intermediate Consumption and Fixed Capital Consumption) ^b	
	Thous. ha	%	Thous. Persons	%	Million Euro	%
Austria	2670	1.5	1674	1.8	5831.3	1.9
Belgium	1354	0.8	54.0	0.6	6785.3	2.2
Denmark	2615	1.5	61.6	0.6	9443.9	3.1
Finland	2194	1.3	92.9	1.0	4302.4	1.4
France	27314	16.1	69749	7.4	53726.2	17.7
Germany	16715	9.7	532.0	5.6	46099.8	15.1
Greece	4254	2.6	423.4	4.8	6821.1	2.2
Ireland	4984	2.8	110.4	1.2	6167.2	2.0
Italy	12298	7.3	871.2	9.2	33095.4	11.1
Luxembourg	131	0.1	3.1	0.0	407.1	0.1
Netherlands	1796	1.0	170.0	1.9	21361.8	6.9
Portugal	3642	2.1	304.4	3.2	5446.1	1.8
Spain	23220	13.4	819.4	8.6	26383.6	8.9
Sweden	302	1.7	91.5	1.0	5611.1	1.8
United Kingdom	16394	9.5	369.6	3.9	21359.2	7.0
EU-15	123612	71.4	4804.8	50.7	253051.2	83.4
Bulgaria	4492	2.6	221.0	2.3	2793.1	0.9
Croatia	1563	0.9	113.3	1.2	1538.2	0.5
Cyprus	112	0.1	19.6	0.1	1616.8	0.1
Czechia	3455	2.0	146.3	1.5	4121.2	1.4
Estonia	990	0.6	23.1	0.2	738.2	0.2
Hungary	4671	2.7	122.7	1.3	5794.9	1.9
Latvia	1931	1.1	61.4	0.6	1108.1	0.4
Lithuania	2925	1.7	105.5	1.1	2327.9	0.7
Malta	11	0.0	2.2	0.0	66.8	0.0
Poland	14406	8.3	1672.2	17.6	16780.0	5.5
Romania	12303	7.2	1974.9	20.8	12077.1	4.0
Slovakia	1890	1.1	68.5	0.7	1076.2	0.6
Slovenia	488	0.3	33.0	0.6	984.8	0.3
EU-13	49142	29.6	4627.2	48.3	50355.4	16.6
EU-28	171054	100.0	9478.5	100.0	304206.6	100.0
USA	364305	100.0	2108.2	100.0	206348.9	100.0

Table 2. Ratios between production factors in the EU and US agriculture in 2017.

Countries	UAA per 1 Person Employed (ha)	Value of Capital Inputs per 1 Person Employed (Thous. Euro)	Value of Capital Inputs per 1 ha UAA (Thous. Euro)
Austria	15.95	34.85	2.18
Belgium	25.07	125.65	5.01
Denmark	42.45	153.31	3.61
Finland	23.62	46.31	1.96
France	39.85	76.98	1.93
Germany	31.42	86.48	2.75
Greece	10.04	15.04	1.50
Ireland	44.24	55.86	1.26
Italy	14.46	36.68	2.67
Luxembourg	42.26	131.32	3.11
Netherlands	10.20	119.67	11.73
Portugal	11.86	17.49	1.50
Spain	28.35	32.93	1.16
Sweden	33.02	61.52	1.86
United Kingdom	44.36	57.79	1.30
EU-15	25.73	52.79	2.05
Bulgaria	20.33	12.38	0.61
Croatia	13.80	13.58	0.98
Cyprus	11.67	43.42	3.72
Czechia	23.62	28.17	1.19
Estonia	43.07	31.96	0.74
Hungary	20.97	26.02	1.24
Latvia	31.45	18.05	0.57
Lithuania	27.73	21.21	0.77
Malta	5.00	31.27	6.25
Poland	8.61	10.02	1.16
Romania	6.33	6.12	0.97
Slovakia	27.99	28.85	1.03
Slovenia	9.21	18.58	2.02
EU-13	10.56	10.82	1.02
EU-28	18.26	32.09	1.76
USA	166.49	94.16	0.57

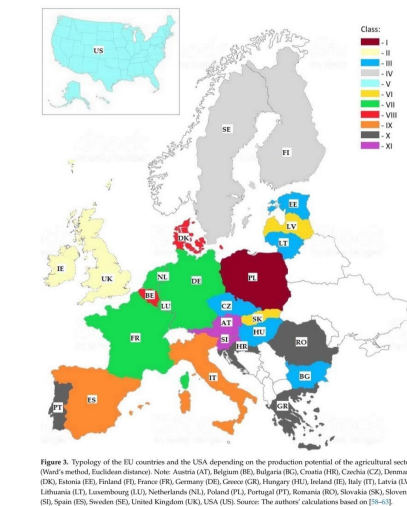


Figure 3. Typology of the EU countries and the USA depending on the production potential of the agricultural sector (Pearce's method, Euclidean distance). Note: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (UK), USA (US). Source: The authors' calculations based on [38–43].

Table 4. Characteristics of types of analyzed countries distinguished based on the production potential of the agricultural sector.

Class	Characteristics of Type
I	High—the highest in the analyzed population—the share of labor in total inputs; small UAA per 1 person employed; very high ratio of current assets to fixed assets
II	High ratio of current assets to fixed assets; very low productivity of current assets
III	Average type, not distinguished by any particularly characteristic features from the other countries
IV	Low share of labor in total inputs—the lowest among analyzed countries; very low productivity of current assets—the lowest in the analyzed population
V	Low share of labor in total inputs; very high UAA per 1 person employed—the highest in the analyzed population; high level of capital assets per 1 person employed and high ratio of current assets to fixed assets
VI	Very high share of labor in total inputs—the highest in the analyzed population
VII	Average type, not distinguished by any particularly characteristic features from the other countries
VIII	Low share of labor in total inputs; very high level of capital assets per 1 person employed—the highest in the analyzed population; low productivity of current assets
IX	Low ratio of current assets to fixed assets; high productivity of current assets—the highest in the analyzed population
X	Low share of labor, but high share of labor in total assets; lowest level of land assets per 1 person employed in the analyzed population
XI	High share of labor in total inputs and low ratio of current assets to fixed assets

Sitography, bibliography, filmography

https://www.liberation.fr/environnement/agriculture/la-guerre-en-ukraine-remet-la-souverainete-alimentaire-de-leurope-au-coeur-des-debats-20220303_47OJCRM425HWJCHTHSSSL6ZHIY/
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