

Reforming the CAP: Finding the balance between economic viability and environmental ambition

On 4 November 2025, the European Parliament hosted a policy conference on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, co-chaired by MEPs Herbert DORFMANN and Juan Ignacio ZOIDO. The discussion brought together EU decision-makers and sector representatives to assess how the CAP can remain economically viable while responding to environmental and structural challenges. Against the backdrop of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework and proposed changes to CAP governance, exchanges focused on income stability, competitiveness, environmental delivery and the need for a predictable policy framework capable of supporting long-term investment in European agriculture.

On 4 November 2025, the European Parliament hosted a high-level conference co-chaired by MEPs Herbert DORFMANN (Italy, EPP) and Juan Ignacio ZOIDO (Spain, EPP). The event gathered policymakers, experts and stakeholders to reflect on the evolving role of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in supporting both economic resilience and environmental ambition.

In his opening remarks, DORFMANN stressed that the CAP remains one of the EU's most integrated policy instruments and should retain its distinct structure. He expressed concern over proposals within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) that could merge CAP funding with cohesion policy, potentially diluting its agricultural focus and reducing long-term planning stability. For DORFMANN, protecting the two-pillar architecture is essential to ensure that targeted rural and environmental objectives continue to be addressed.

ZOIDO echoed this position, noting that farmers face increasing costs, regulatory uncertainty and external pressures. He argued that simplification should not come at the cost of effectiveness and called for reform that enhances farm viability, fosters generational renewal, and reduces bureaucratic complexity.

The Commission's perspective on future reform

Catherine GESLAIN-LANÉELLE, Director for Strategy and Policy Analysis at DG AGRI, delivered the keynote address. She underlined that the current CAP Strategic Plans provide a flexible yet complex framework for Member States. Acknowledging budgetary pressures and delivery challenges, she



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called for stronger cooperation between EU institutions and national authorities to maintain alignment with both environmental goals and competitiveness.

GESLAIN-LANÉELLE indicated that the Commission would closely monitor the implications of the proposed MFF structure, particularly the risk of weakening rural development support. She also highlighted the need to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and streamline the CAP's administrative processes.

Towards evidence-based and inclusive reform

Opening the expert panel, Tassos HANIOTIS (ForumforAg / IIASA) urged policymakers to move beyond polarised debates and focus on outcomes. He suggested that the CAP must evolve towards supporting sustainable productivity, using clear metrics to measure success. HANIOTIS warned that ignoring data and long-term trends risks undermining both credibility and impact.

Elli TSIFOROU, Secretary General of COPA-COGECA, defended the CAP's current structure, especially the need for a strong first pillar to support farm income. She voiced concern that ongoing reforms risk alienating farmers and called for more inclusive policymaking.

David BALDOCK of IEEP highlighted the need for stronger environmental integration, including clearer links between payments and performance. He called for improvements in monitoring and transparency to ensure that green objectives are delivered.

Théo PAQUET of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) underlined areas of common ground between farming and environmental interests. He advocated for more ambitious eco-schemes, better-defined indicators and more robust enforcement at Member State level.

Cédric BENOIST (AGPB) closed the first part of the panel by insisting that farmers must be given the tools and confidence to adapt. He warned that any reform which undermines economic viability will also undermine support for the broader green transition.

Clarifying the Commission's approach

In response to panellists' concerns, GESLAIN-LANÉELLE defended the Commission's engagement process, referencing consultations, civil dialogue groups and the strategic dialogue, which she said had meaningfully contributed to shaping the proposed CAP vision. She emphasised that the Commission was not merely applying a technical reorganisation of funds but aiming to preserve core policy objectives.

She pushed back against the perception that current proposals ignored farmers' efforts, especially regarding the recognition of environmentally beneficial practices. Measures such as soil protection, water conservation and biodiversity stewardship should, she argued, count towards environmental targets. She also noted that the Commission intends to maintain a level of oversight in the approval of Member States' plans to ensure consistency and impact.

Balancing conditions and incentives

The Commission reiterated its intention to move away from overly rigid conditionality, acknowledging that complexity had previously hindered effectiveness. A shift towards incentives, where appropriate, could better support behavioural change. At the same time, concerns remain about the capacity of Member States to implement these new frameworks effectively, particularly under tight budgets and limited administrative resources.

ELO's closing reflections

Jurgen TACK, Secretary General of the European Landowners' Organization (ELO), offered a frank conclusion. He welcomed the dialogue but warned that the sustainability of the CAP cannot be achieved without ensuring farm profitability. "Profitable farming is a precondition for every environmental ambition we share," he stated. Jurgen TACK called for a stable regulatory environment, predictable investment tools and fewer but better rules that reward multifunctional land use.

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He reaffirmed the importance of maintaining a common baseline across Europe to safeguard the single market. He also urged policymakers to preserve a dedicated rural development function within the CAP and to avoid folding agriculture into overly broad partnership frameworks.

In TACK's view, the path forward should include transition payments, streamlined conditionality, improved risk management tools and better alignment between innovation funding and regulatory incentives. He concluded by cautioning that without clearer rules, long-term stability and fair remuneration, farmer confidence in the reform process could be seriously undermined.

Conclusion

As moderator Mark TITTERINGTON noted, the conference revealed more common ground than many had expected. While positions differ, there is shared recognition that the CAP must adapt to an evolving landscape while remaining fit for purpose. Future reforms will need to reconcile economic pressures with environmental ambition, grounded in evidence and guided by open, structured dialogue.

