EU set to miss major climate target due to inaction on methane emissions from animal farming – new report

Lack of effective policies to reduce emissions from animal farming means the EU is now largely off track to achieve targets agreed under the Global Methane Pledge, which the bloc itself had heralded as a milestone achievement in global climate diplomacy.

Green groups and Members of the European Parliament today have slammed the European Commission and member states for their failure to tackle methane emissions from livestock farming, warning that the EU is on track to miss its own climate targets as a result.

At an event in the European Parliament, the Changing Markets Foundation presented its latest analysis of EU climate policies and targets. [1] The study found that, despite broad support for measures aimed at reducing methane emissions from other sources such as the energy sector, the EU currently lacks policies that would drive reductions from its biggest methane source, namely animal agriculture. [2]

Lack of action on this front means the bloc will almost certainly miss its goal to achieve a 30% cut in overall methane emissions by the end of the decade, as agreed under the Global Methane Pledge championed by the EU itself last year at COP26.

Adding fuel to the fire, the European Commission recently voiced similar concerns. In a leaked report from earlier this month, [3] the EU executive warned governments that the EU will not meet the reductions that it has committed to under the Pledge unless it starts tackling emissions from agriculture.

The livestock sector is responsible for more than half of the EU’s total methane emissions. Methane, which is far more potent than carbon dioxide despite dissolving in the atmosphere at a faster rate, is responsible for about 0.5°C of global warming. Because it is a relatively short-lived gas, experts have identified a swift reduction in methane emissions as a key opportunity to slow the rate of warming.

An earlier analysis by Changing Market Foundation estimated that existing measures being implemented across the three highest methane emitting sectors (agriculture, energy and waste) will only help the bloc achieve around 17% of methane reduction by 2030.

The study also showed the EU has significant potential to cut its methane emissions by 49 to 68% by implementing reduction measures across all three sectors, and as much as 36% by solely focusing on the agriculture sector.

According to Nusa Urbancic, Campaigns Director at the Changing Market Foundation, intensive livestock farming is one of the most contentious and polarised topics in climate policy. The sector is represented by powerful lobby groups who have been fiercely pushing against the introduction of any measure aimed at greening the industry by shifting support away from large, industrial farms and on to small-scale farmers whose climate and ecological impact is much lower. [4]

“We’re in a climate and ecological crisis which are being driven in large part by destructive and wasteful agricultural practices such as the industrial production of meat. It will be impossible for the EU to reduce methane emissions in line with the Pledge without embarking on the transformation of its food system. Our leaders must start listening to scientists instead of lobbyists.” Urbancic said.
MEP Francisco Guerreiro, from the Greens, said:

"It is high time for policy makers to once and for all speak about the agricultural sector and its pollutant emissions without hesitation, including methane. By keeping the issue in a blind spot, for example by avoiding discussions on animal reduction per farm and on the need to promote more plant-based diets, we are only neglecting farmers and compromising our own existence on this planet."

MEP Eric Andrieu, from the Socialists & Democrats, said:

"It is certain that we have to decrease the consumption of meat and move to 'less and better meat'. There are environmental benefits to maintain cattle in extensive areas, so the European Commission needs to ensure that we take into account the diversity of cattle farms and prioritise reductions in areas where there is a high density of cattle. On the other hand, the European Commission should avoid incoherent policies such as increasing meat imports through new free trade agreements."

Changing Markets is calling for an EU-wide methane reduction target, which could sit under the Effort Sharing Regulation. [5] The EU should also increase the ambition of policies undergoing revision, such as the Industrial Emissions Directive, [6] and propose an ambitious Sustainable Food Systems Framework, [7] which could become a driver for the uptake of healthier diets.

Notes to Editors


[2] The overall assessment demonstrates that there is a policy vacuum to tackle methane from animal farming. While methane emissions in the energy sector are being addressed by a dedicated regulation proposed by the European Commission in December 2021, methane emissions in the agriculture sector are addressed by a set of patchy measures across a wide range of policies. Overall, these fail to enforce mitigating measures that will reduce methane emissions in the livestock sector:

- The Common Agriculture Policy (2024-2027), the cornerstone policy dealing with agricultural matters, was found to have very limited impact on livestock emissions (particularly in the countries with the highest emissions);
- The Effort Sharing Regulation, whose purpose is setting target for the period 2021-2030 for non-CO2 emissions in a variety of sectors including agriculture, fails to set specific targets for agricultural methane emissions and contains potential loopholes that limit GHG reductions in the sector.
- There is still room for improvements with policies currently under revision, most notably, the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED), which is currently going through co-decision process.
- The upcoming Sustainable Food System Law (proposal expected in 2023) could also be a key leverage encouraging the shift to healthier diets, which is the single measure with the highest potential for methane reductions.


