

Most urgent action on methane ignored in EU's Vision for Agriculture

On February 19, the European Commission's Vision for Food and Agriculture was published following [the consensus achieved](#) in the Strategic Dialogue, which stated that 'business as usual is not an option' for the farming sector. While the Vision includes promising mentions on the need to review the EU's protein production and consumption paths, it did not make any concrete commitments to re-think the food system and had no mention of the super-pollutant methane, which animal agriculture in the EU is largely responsible for. Over 50% of the EU's methane emissions come from agriculture (mostly through animal rearing), a potent greenhouse gas and a short-lived climate pollutant, with an atmospheric lifetime of around 12 years and a very high heating potential. Due to its short lifespan, actions to cut methane emissions at source would rapidly reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases and is therefore critical to stopping short of irreversible tipping points in the planetary system. Methane has already contributed to a third of global heating today and is a pre-cursor to ground-level ozone, a health damaging air pollutant also affecting the environment and agriculture, leading to an estimated loss [of at least €2 billion in](#) damage to food crops every year in Europe.

While the Commission has committed to climate neutrality, methane emissions from agriculture have close to stagnated for the past two decades, and current and planned measures will do little to encourage the deep cuts needed in the next 15 years to meet this commitment. During the last Commission's mandate, big meat and dairy companies, along with their powerful lobby groups, [fought hard to derail meaningful action on methane emissions](#). The Vision focuses on protecting the existing dominant model of animal rearing rather than embracing the opportunity to support farmers to shift towards more resource efficient and environmentally friendly production. The Vision talks about incentives and voluntary action, but [research has shown](#) that these continue to act as a smokescreen to delay necessary system change. What we need is an ambitious and binding target to reduce methane emissions in the short-term, and an updated strategy outlining the different instruments already available to deliver on this objective.

This [needs to happen soon](#) alongside a corresponding shift in diets towards more plant-based consumption, ([in line with EU market trends reported on in 2023](#)). This would be a win-win for the EU where overconsumption of animal products, particularly red and processed meat, contributes to [significant health problems in the region](#). [Over 130 organisations](#) have urged the Commission to include a plant-based action plan as a clear and tangible way to reduce methane emissions and support farmers in the EU to better mitigate and adapt to global heating which is already having a devastating impact on European farmers.

Finally, the heavy focus on technology to address livestock emissions overlooks the most holistic way of reducing emissions and other environmental pressures, as well as promoting animal welfare and health benefits. [The EU strategy to reduce methane emissions](#) identified that a strategic vision needs to be based on a balance of technologies, markets and dietary changes. [Studies show](#) that technological solutions such as manure management and feed additives [can play a limited role](#) in achieving climate goals, but that most reductions can only be achieved by reducing animal numbers. As a co-founder of the Global Methane Pledge, the EU has a responsibility to demonstrate the ambition needed to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030. [There are important opportunities](#) to secure co-benefits associated with scaling down intensive animal farming which allows for shifting toward extensive, pasture-based systems. An overall shift in focus to more plant-based systems and support for organic and agroecological animal rearing practices can reduce methane (CH₄) from enteric fermentation, ammonia (NH₃) from manure, and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) from manure application. Extensive grazing systems require fewer external inputs (such as fertilisers and feed), significantly reducing indirect emissions. Such opportunities start first at the setting of targets and revision of complementary instruments which give impetus to the policies undertaken. These are set out in the recommendations below.

Recommendations

- Set an ambitious and binding target for cutting methane emissions through the revision of the Climate Law towards 2040, the revision of binding targets in the National Emission reduction Commitments Directive for the years 2030, 2035 and 2040 and a corresponding revision of the Gothenburg Protocol (to the UNECE Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution Convention).
- Develop and implement an updated methane action plan, with clear commitments and reduction targets for agriculture, outlining how to achieve methane reduction targets in the food system, including a realistic assessment of how much can be achieved with technical measures vs. dietary shift.
- Promote and support the development of plant-based options to phase out over-reliance on animal source food products, including through reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and support to farmers to reduce herd sizes and switch to more sustainable models of production such as organic farming and agroecology.
- Regulate meat and dairy companies by obliging companies operating in the EU to establish science-based emissions reduction targets aligned with a 1.5°C trajectory and the Global Methane Pledge, including Scope 3 emissions and regular reporting of their progress.
- Stop public promotions of meat and dairy products and crack down on greenwashing.