POLICY BRIEF

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Barriers and drivers across EU policies to achieve Climate-Smart Agriculture

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Building from the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029, the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture report, and ahead of the upcoming Vision for Agriculture and Food, to be released in the first 100 days of the new EU Commission, **this policy brief examines the contribution existing EU policies contribute to behavioural change to more climate-smart agricultural practices.**

In particular, in view of the of the tabling of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2027 due in July 2025, **this policy brief provides an analysis of 23 selected regulations of EU policies as regards to their compliance with the three key principles of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA): (i) productivity, (ii) adaptation and (iii) mitigation.**

The analysis highlights the need for a systemic and coherent approach in current and future sectoral policies to drive fair, inclusive, and sustainable climate-smart practices effectively.

Background

This analysis is undertaken as part of the Horizon Europe project BEATLES, which stands for "Co-creating Behavioural Change Towards Climate-Smart Food Systems" (2022-2026). It aspires to change the way agri-food systems currently operate and accelerate behavioural shift to CSA and smart farming technologies.

AEIDL (European Association for Innovation in Local Development) heads the work focused on policy recommendations and tools. Led by Blanca Casares and Serafín Pazos-Vidal, the aim is to assist policymakers and implementers in designing and implementing policy measures that foster fair, inclusive, and sustainable climate-smart practices and behaviors. From the behavioural science perspective, the notion of fairness is fundamental to the development of recommendations in the BEATLES project.

AEIDL has been working closely with partners from 5 pilot regions in 5 Member States (Lithuania, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands), examining 5 value chains (wheat, dairy, organic apple, pig sector, onions and potatoes) and its compliance with CSA practices.

AEIDL is coordinating the EU multi-actor working group were we bring together leading EU policymakers, practitioners and experts from inside and outside the project. We are turning the evidence gathered from the BEATLES research into actionable EU policy recommendations to incorporate climate smart practices into EU policies, in particularly Agricullture and the next CAP.

As part of our advocacy and dissemination of results, AEIDL also published a policy paper on The road to a post 2027 Common Agricultural Policy, to illustrate the next CAP design and implementation challenges. It includes a concise timeline of the steps ahead for the post-2027 CAP, and helps stakeholders identify what are the opportunities to best influence the shaping of the future CAP.

Understanding Climate-Smart Agriculture

Since the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) introduced the concept of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) at the 2010 Hague Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change, there has been growing support at international and national levels for this approach.

Climate-Smart Agriculture is an approach that provides a roadmap to **sustainable agricultural development.** CSA is an **integrated approach** for developing agricultural strategies to address the interlinked challenges of economic viability, food security, and climate change, aiming to achieve three objectives: (i) sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes; (ii) adapting and building resilience to climate change and (iii) reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions.

This approach recognises that **synergies and trade-offs** between the three pillars should be considered in the planning and implementation of agricultural strategies and provides the groundwork to orient technical, policy and investment conditions for agriculture to respond to climate change and future food demands.

EU policy framework review: guiding the transition to Climate-Smart Agriculture?

Our BEATLES findings show that farmer adoption rates of CSA practices and technologies and diffusion in Europe remains slow. T**he EU lacks a dedicated policy discourse on CSA** since it is primarily perceived as an United Nations concept.

Consequently, there is a l**ack of explicit EU policies directly addressing CSA.** Because of this, AEIDL has explored **how existing EU instruments and policies can align with and can support the three key CSA components.**

Since 2022, AEIDL has carried out a number of activities that have enabled it to understand the policy framework that can support the transition to CSA. AEIDL conducted desk research at both European and national levels, including a literature review, mapping 100 pieces of scientific literature to identify the role of CAP in the introduction of behavioural change towards Climate-Smart practices and how the CAP influences (positively/negatively, actively/passively) behavioural shifts towards sustainable food systems.

The results have been included in the BEATLES Integrated framework of decision-making factors, and partially summarised in Gemtou et al, (2024).

References for Climate-Smart Agriculture

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Is the Common Agricultural Policy (and other EU policies) contributing to Climate Smart practices?

Building upon this earlier BEATLES policy research work, we examined the connections between 23 EU policies and the three CSA principles: **productivity, adaptation** and **mitigation**. The table below outlines the nature of these linkages—categorised as direct (D), indirect (I), or undetermined (-) —between policy objectives, targets and the CSA principles.

CSA-relevant EU policies	CSA Objectives		
	i.Sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes	ii.Adapting and building resilience to climate change	iii.Reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions
Common Agricultural Policy	D	D	D
Farm to Fork Strategy	D	D	D
Biodiversity Strategy 2030	I	D	I
European Climate Law	-	D	D
Organic production and labelling of organic products	D	I	I
Food quality certification schemes	D	-	-
Protection of geographical indications	I	-	-
Fruit and vegetables and processed fruit and vegetables sectors	I	-	-
Nitrates Directive	I	I	-
Pesticides Directive	I	I	I
Water Framework Directive	I	I	I
LULUCF Regulation	I	D	D
General Food Law	D	-	-
Food safety regulations	I	-	-
Health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption	I	-	I
EU animal health law	I	-	-
Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas	I	I	I
EU Digital Strategy	I	D	D
EU Mission: a Soil Deal for Europe	D	D	D
Industrial Strategy agri-food pathway	D	D	D
Nature Restoration Law	-	D	-
Framework Law on Sustainable Food Systems	I	I	I
EU carbon removals certification framework	-	D	D

Table 1. Analysis of contributions to CSA across EU policies

Our documentary analysis of the official EU legislation underscores t**he need for a systemic approach across existing and future sectoral EU policies** to foster a shift towards fair, inclusive, and sustainable climate-smart practices, ensuring coherence and maximising policy impact.

- On the CSA principle of **sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes,** the policies with a direct impact include the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Farm to Fork Strategy, Organic Production and Labelling of Organic Products Regulation, Food Quality Certification Schemes, General Food Law, EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe, and the Industrial Strategy's agri-food pathway.
- As the other two CSA Principles — **adapting to and building resilience against climate change, and reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions** — the policies directly or indirectly supporting these goals include the CAP, Farm to Fork Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy 2030, European Climate Law, Organic Production and Labelling of Organic Products, Nitrates Directive, Pesticides Directive, Water Framework Directive, LULUCF Regulation, Health Rules on Animal By-products, Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, EU Digital Strategy, EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe, the Nature Restoration Law, and the Industrial Strategy agri-food pathway.
- EU policies such as the Framework Law on Sustainable Food Systems, and the EU Carbon Removals Certification Framework further support these principles.

Therefore, in view of the forthcoming Vision for Agriculture and Food and the European Commission Legislative Work Programme it is necessary to have a **more integrative approach of climate-smart agricultural approach across EU policies** as a key factor to deliver the EU green and digital objectives 2030 to 2050.

This requires not only more explicit references to CSA's holistic and integrated goals in EU legislation and funding instruments, but also a rethink of existing policies relating to smart and sustainable practices. In this regard, the new tools proposed by the Commission Political Guidelines (**Implementation Dialogues, Stress Tests of EU Acquis, Reality Checks** of EU legislation implementation and the enhanced Better Regulation/**Rural Proofing** exercises) provide an opportunity to both mainstream climate-smart behavioural incentives across EU policies while addressing the existing gaps at both policy design and implementation levels.

Disclaimer

This Policy Brief "Barriers and drivers across EU policies to achieve Climate-Smart Agriculture" has been produced by AEIDL (European Association for Innovation in Local Development), partner of the Horizon Europe BEATLES project.

AEIDL is responsible for the (funded by the European Union under GA no. 101060645) and responsible for developing EU policy recommendations and tools that guide policy formulations that enable a transition to fair, inclusive, sustainable climate-smart practices and behaviours. This Policy Brief is a simplified version of a number of technical papers being developed as part our our Work Package 5 and is aimed to contribute to the priorities of the new EU Commission towards climate-neutral and environment-friendly practices and behaviours.

The BEATLES project is coordinated by the Agricultural University of Athens.

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