CARBON FARMING: EUROPE’S NEW TREND?

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Carbon farming's overall objective is to reduce carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere.

In practice, by using various agricultural methods ranging from crop rotation, cover crops, and reduced tillage to precision nitrogen application, farmers aim to contribute to tackling climate change.

An EU official told EURACTIV that the Commission intends to kick-start and upscale carbon farming actions by land managers to incentivise practices on natural ecosystems that increase carbon sequestration.

“These actions will enable the land sector to contribute to the Union’s mitigation efforts, paving the way for a policy of negative emissions in the future combined with strong co-benefits on biodiversity and the provision ecosystem services,” the official said, adding that a legislative proposal for the certification of carbon removals is due for the last quarter of 2022.

In this European Special Report, EURACTIV and its partners across Europe will examine the prospects of carbon farming, its application on national level as well as the challenges EU farmers are expected to face.

This European Special Report was a joint publication between EURACTIV’s network partners in Germany, France, UK, Spain, and Poland.
Farmers see chances in carbon farming but must be market-led

Berlin says carbon farming ‘high priority’ as farmers call for further action

French farmers endorse carbon farming but highlight transition costs

British farmers call for government support to reach ‘net-zero’ agriculture

Spain views carbon farming as a climate solution

Expert: Carbon farming ideal to boost Poland’s yields
Agriculture stakeholders see a shift towards carbon farming in the European Union positively but emphasise that details over financial incentives for EU farmers must be determined for its proper rollout.

The overall objective of carbon farming – a new buzzword in agriculture – is to increase the amount of carbon dioxide (CO2) stored in the soil and thereby reduce its presence in the atmosphere.

In practice, farmers aim to contribute to efforts to tackle climate change by using various agricultural methods ranging from crop rotation, cover crops, and reduced tillage to precision nitrogen application.

The European Commission has said it plans to launch a carbon farming initiative by the end of 2021. A carbon removal certification mechanism already announced in the Circular Economic Action Plan will be presented by 2023.

EU farmers say they have already been voluntarily applying such practices, and there is an “undeniable will” to continue so. However, they want to make sure that carbon farming’s practical implementation will not result in an additional burden for them.

Pekka Pesonen, secretary-general of the EU farmers and cooperatives’ association Copa-Cogeca, said that if

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carbon farming were to be applied universally, farmers must see the extra costs that will incur compensation.

“The carbon farming initiative and the certification scheme for carbon removals could become an additional source of income for farmers committed to reaching environmental goals. However, it can easily become a financial and administrative burden for them, increasing their costs, potentially reducing their productivity, and lowering their incomes,” Pesonen told EURACTIV.

REWARDS OUTSIDE CAP

Pesonen explained that farmers should not be rewarded through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as this would only lead to a redistribution of resources and ignore the fact that farmers and foresters already make a significant contribution to carbon sequestration.

Instead, he stressed that market-based carbon farming schemes could contribute to climate change mitigation.

“This involves the development of a carbon market for market-based carbon crediting schemes, where farmers and foresters are remunerated for their ecosystem service, in accordance with the relevant IPCC guidelines,” he said, referring to the international panel on climate change.

Moreover, he said it must be made sure that carbon farming and carbon credits do not become a default mechanism for big and multinational enterprises to offset their emissions.

“The industry must undertake their own efforts to reduce emissions and not fully rely on farmers’ efforts to sequestrate carbon,” he said, adding that all social actors should work together for a better future.

Célia Nyssens, an agriculture expert at the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), voiced similar concerns, saying farmers’ carbon credits should not be used by “companies like Shell or Microsoft to get to green their own names on the back of farmers”.

Nyssens said there is also uncertainty when it comes to carbon liability in cases of extreme natural phenomena.

“If farmers are to sequester carbon in their soil and produce a carbon credit for that and sell it, and then there’s, for example, a big flooding event or a big drought, and some of that carbon is lost back to the atmosphere, who is liable?” Nyssens wondered.

The expert explained that carbon farming is not something new as these agricultural practices have already been used by farmers.

“It’s just kind of going back to the good practices of our ancestors, but with new scientific understanding of how these practices benefit soils,” she told EURACTIV.

EU OFFICIAL: INCENTIVES FROM PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SOURCES

An EU official told EURACTIV that a critical step for carbon farming is establishing a regulatory certification framework based on “robust accounting rules” for high-quality, sustainable carbon removals from natural ecosystems and “industrial solutions”.

The EU official said that land managers are rewarded for their management practice or the actual amount of carbon sequestered via carbon farming.

“The revenue from carbon farming becomes an additional income source from which land managers can benefit in addition to their traditional products such as food and biomass,” the official said.

Land managers, the official added, would at the same time benefit in many cases from the advantages of higher quality land and have somewhat better production performance and higher resilience to climate change.

“Financial incentives that can come from public or private sources will support the large-scale development of carbon farming practices across member states.”

WHAT IS THE INDUSTRY DOING

The private sector has already taken initiatives testing carbon farming on the ground. For example, last summer, agrifood giant Bayer launched its own “Carbon Programme” in Europe.

Twenty-seven farmers across seven countries in the EU and beyond (France, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, UK, and Ukraine) participate in a three-year project led by Bayer focusing on climate-smart farming practices like using cover crops and tillage reduction.

This implementation of new

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practices will be continuously monitored and improved.

According to the company, farmers, experts, and food value chain players work together in a carbon farming lab where they jointly test activities and generate learnings.

Considering that currently, there is no carbon market for farmers to sell credits, the companies have focused on working with governments and other companies to drive climate-smart agriculture.

“In line with the objectives of the EU Green Deal, we established the Bayer Carbon Program to actively contribute to the development of carbon farming activities in Europe. We are working across public and private sectors along the value chain, embracing innovation and putting farmers at the centre of our efforts,” Liam Condon, president of the crop science division at Bayer, told EURACTIV.

This collaboration, he added, will help decarbonise the European food system in a way that works for farmers, the environment and consumers.

“The main idea is to reward growers for adopting climate-smart farming practices like using cover crops, tillage reduction, crop rotations and precision nitrogen application. These activities sequester carbon in the soil while improving soil health, resilience and productivity and reducing emissions.”
Berlin says carbon farming ‘high priority’ as farmers call for further action

By Julia Dahm | EURACTIV.de

While carbon farming is a priority for the German government, farmers say they are not doing enough to support measures financially. Environmentalists add that some of the promoted practices have limited climate value.

“Carbon farming is a big opportunity for climate policy as well as agriculture,” the German farmers association’s (DBV) secretary-general, Bernhard Krüsken, told EURACTIV Germany.

He added that the agricultural sector was ready to “do its part” in making Germany and Europe climate neutral.

While harnessing natural carbon sinks in agriculture and forestry would be “indispensable” for reaching net-zero, Krüsken said, such climate measures would also have to pay off financially.

“Without adequate remuneration, measures will not be implemented to the extent that is needed,” he explained.

For the German agricultural ministry, promoting carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry is of “high priority” and a key instrument for reaching the sector’s climate targets, a ministry spokesperson told EURACTIV Germany.

The country’s climate protection

This article was originally published on EURACTIV.de. Read the article.
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law foresees carbon sequestration measures in agriculture and forestry should provide an overall sink of 25 million tonnes of CO2 by 2030. According to the spokesperson, carbon sequestration measures are therefore being promoted through various policy instruments.

‘SPEEDING UP’ NATIONAL ACTION

Within Germany’s energy and climate fund, €75 million by 2023 is earmarked for humus restoration on arable land, in addition to €21 million from the country’s programme for immediate climate action.

Moreover, the ministry said “significant funds” are budgeted to implement the national Arable Farming Strategy, which outgoing agricultural minister Julia Klöckner presented in August. The strategy aims to “strengthen the contribution of arable farming to climate protection”.

From the DBV’s perspective, not enough is being done. In Germany, “while overambitious objectives have been set for carbon sinks, a framework for certification or remuneration is lacking,” Krüsken said. “Here, we significantly need to speed things up,” he added.

Once a “unitary and scientifically validated framework” for quantifying the amount of sequestered carbon is agreed upon, this would need to form the basis for different mechanisms of remuneration, Krüsken explained.

“One could imagine remuneration from the energy and climate fund using the means of the CO2 emission trading system, but private remuneration systems could also be envisioned,” he said.

However, environmentalists are critical of integrating carbon farming into emission trading schemes. “There is a risk that, by generating certificates, the sector’s activities for reducing emissions are curbed, because these emissions can then be offset to a large extent,” Johann Rathke from the environmental NGO WWF told EURACTIV Germany.

MEASURING IMPACT

This can be especially problematic whenever the amount of carbon sequestered by a measure is difficult to measure, he added.

“If you want to remunerate the actual impact of carbon farming measures, you need a large amount of data and measurements,” Xenia Brandt from the small farmers’ association AbL said. “It is extremely difficult to gather this data as accurately as it would be necessary,” she added.

In practice, she explained, financial support is, therefore, most often geared towards remunerating the implementation of specific measures rather than their impact.

Stakeholders’ views also diverge when it comes to the question of which specific farming practices the government should focus its efforts on.

From Krüsken’s perspective, measures must be “as integrated into production as possible, to guarantee food supply while also avoiding CO2 leakage”.

Measures for humus buildup, such as planting intermediate crops, can be integrated into the active cultivation of agricultural land. But from the perspective of environmental campaigners, such practices are not the most effective on the table for carbon sequestration.

“Humus is very fragile and not really suitable for storing carbon over a longer period,” Michael Berger from WWF said. He explained that because emissions can escape again after they were sequestered, it is very difficult to measure how much of a carbon sink humus can actually provide.

Instead, from Berger’s perspective, rewetting moorland is the measure with the “highest potential” for carbon sequestration.

In Germany, large moor areas in the northeast and the south of the country that have been degraded hold the potential for providing significant carbon sinks by being rewet, Rathke explained.

FARM TO FORK ‘SUFFICIENT’ FRAMEWORK

In October, Germany’s federal and regional agriculture and environment ministers signed a common agreement on moor protection and rewetting, which foresees that 5 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent should be sequestered in moorlands until 2030.

However, many farmers see this more cautiously than humus buildup as rewetted areas can only be used for

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farming to a limited extent. “Farms need long-term, reliable income prospects, as well as options for continuing the agricultural usage of areas,” the DBV’s statement on the ministers’ agreement reads.

According to current budgeting plans, the national agricultural ministry will spend around €330 million on moorland protection between 2021 and 2025. Among other things, these means will be used to promote measures for enabling farmers to still use rewetted areas per local conditions, the spokesperson said.

Apart from national measures, Germany also supports carbon farming through the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The country’s catalogue of so-called “eco schemes” – programmes for remunerating sustainable agricultural practices within the CAP – includes support for crop diversification and the cultivation of leguminous plants set to boost the soil’s carbon storage capacity, the ministry explained.

The spokesperson also added that Germany’s agriculture ministry judges the EU’s food flagship policy, the Farm to Fork Strategy, as providing “a suitable framework for carbon farming to become a new business model in agriculture”.

From the DBV’s perspective, the bloc’s goals for carbon sequestration in agriculture are too ambitious, Krüsken said. “However, farmers have high expectations for the carbon removal strategy set to be presented by the Commission in December,” he added.
French farmers endorse carbon farming but highlight transition costs

With its low carbon strategy, the French government aims to green agriculture through the development of carbon sequestration in soils. French farmers salute the strategy but call for stronger aids for the transition to be financially sustainable.

“Agriculture can play a decisive role for mankind through the capture of carbon in our soils”, French minister of Agriculture Julien Denormandie said in June, on the occasion of the launch of his ministry’s national action plan for adapting to climate change.

As greening agriculture, while also making it more resilient to climate change, is at the heart of discussions in line with the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), France has also taken individual steps to promote carbon farming these past few years.

Launched by the government in 2019, a Low Carbon Label allows the official certification of projects and engagements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and capture CO2.

Farmers can obtain the label through different agronomic techniques, such as agroecology or conservation agriculture.

Labelled farms can then receive financial support from companies or local authorities wishing to offset their CO2 emissions through the so-called “carbon credits”, linking societal engagement to economic value for farmers.

In the framework of France Relance, the French recovery plan adopted to address the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the ministry of Agriculture is furthermore offering subventions to allow farmers to conduct a carbon diagnostic on their farm.

Endowed with €10 million, the measure launched in April finances 90% of the cost of carbon diagnostics
for farmers having settled less than five years ago. It provides them with a personalised action plan to help them decarbonise their farms.

Finally, the national action plan for adapting to climate change adopted in June aims to “set a course for our agriculture and food system to collectively meet the challenge of our climate commitments and obligations”, according to Julien Denormandie.

One of the six major axes of this plan is to “develop the carbon sequestration potential of agricultural soils and forest and agroforestry biomass”, in other words, carbon farming.

“The agriculture-forestry-wood sector is of strategic importance for the climate by contributing to climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration”, the action plan reads.

Concretely, the ministry wants to develop measures to help increase ground cover and “agroecological infrastructures” such as hedges and support the development of Low Carbon methods through the label and carbon diagnostics.

Finally, the ministry announced it would look into ways of offering “direct financial valorisation” of farmers’ actions favouring climate change mitigation using a study to be carried out this year.

Carbon compensation mechanisms “could constitute an important additional lever for mobilising the agricultural sector in the national climate change mitigation effort”, the ministry stated.

DEVELOPING SOIL LIFE: A MEDIUM-TERM RISK FOR A LONG-TERM BENEFIT

“We need positive feedback for farmers”, told EURACTIV Henri Bies-Péré, vice-president of the main French farmers’ syndicate FNSEA.

“We’re in favour of the government’s Low Carbon strategy and are trying to turn it into an opportunity for farmers”, he added.

Bies-Péré explained that in the face of climate change, carbon farming could allow farmers to recover resilience and benefit from a “new source of income”.

However, while “we are aware that we need to advance because doing nothing is suicidal”, farmers could “use a little helping hand” with the necessary investments to adopt carbon farming measures.

Changing their ways represented a financial cost and a medium-term risk for farmers, he explained. He added that “when we change things, we need to wait several years before finding a new equilibrium and seeing positive feedback on our investment”.

In this period, financial aid – in the form of compensation for environmental services or higher consumer prices –and a strong political framework were necessary to sustain farmers during their evolution.

A similar view is shared by Hervé Mesnard, a French conservation farmer and professor of Agronomy at the University of Picardie Jules Verne.

“We need to make a living; that’s the purpose of the game”, Mesnard the owner of a Bayer reference farm, told EURACTIV. On his farm, he tests and explores different solutions put forward by the agrochemical giant to protect biodiversity and optimise farming practices.

To change an agricultural production system towards greener and more sustainable practices, “you need to invest at a loss for several years”, he said, underlining that as a conservation farmer “I take risks to work with nature, but if nature doesn’t cooperate with me, I fall flat on my face”.

Young farmers starting out today need help to shoulder the risks and investments of the first years, according to Mesnard.

On the other hand, “receiving a financial recompense or not doesn’t change my personal vision: what I am doing is a long-term investment with the aim to one day be able to pass on a more healthy and productive land”, he explained.

“With the deterioration of our climate, I realise that the approach I started taking 30 years ago is today bearing its fruits”, he continued.

“Be it draught or excessive rainfalls, soil life protects us. I’m engaging in carbon farming to increase the resilience and fertility of my land because the only way to suffer less from climate change is to develop soil life.”
British farmers call for government support to reach ‘net-zero’ agriculture

By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com

British farmers have set an ambitious strategy to reach net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in agriculture by 2040. But for all farmers to be able to contribute, the government should step in and provide the necessary means, the National Farmers’ Union of England and Wales (NFU) told EURACTIV.

“British farmers are committed to playing their part in the climate challenge, and that’s why we’ve set ourselves the ambition to reach net zero across British agriculture by 2040,” NFU Deputy President Stuart Roberts said.

He added that to be successful, this must be a “joint effort, not just from farm businesses but from government, stakeholders, and the wider supply chain”.

As every farm is different, Roberts suggested that a “vast portfolio of measures and incentives” from the government is needed to ensure every farm can get involved.

“These will include actions to improve farming’s resource use efficiency, increase on-farm carbon storage in vegetation and soil, and boost production of land-based renewable energy,” he added.

According to NFU data, UK farm emissions currently amount to 45.6 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) equivalent a year – about one-tenth of total UK GHG emissions.

“But in stark contrast to the rest of the economy, only 10% of this is CO2. Around 40% is nitrous dioxide (N2O) and 50% is methane (CH4),” a recent NFU report suggests.

“Opportunities also lie in farming’s unique ability to take carbon out of the atmosphere, not only offsetting its own emissions but playing a part in carbon removal for other sectors

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too. And as people who work the land, farmers are in a great position to extract value from this carbon," he said.

"However, it is an extraordinarily complex area of policy, and a robust carbon price will be absolutely crucial if farm businesses are to consider this as a viable income stream in the future", he added.

**THE ROLE OF PRECISION FARMING**

Roberts said the net zero challenge also presents some “exciting progressions” for the agriculture sector.

He stressed that an increasing number of farmers have switched to precision farming and GPS systems, which “all help businesses decarbonise, and greater investment in the development of agricultural technologies will further aid climate-smart farming”.

However, he noted that the lack of rural digital connectivity is holding back progress and “more needs to be done for farmers to make the most of data and precision technologies”.

According to a NFU report, only 40% of farmers reported that their broadband speeds were sufficient.

EU farmers also face a similar situation. The European Commission is pushing for precision farming practices to be part of the next 2023-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), but poor broadband infrastructure remains a headache.

EU Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski recently said that to reach their targets, member states must capitalise on advances in innovation, technology and digital solutions – such as precision farming.

“Not only will these advances encourage sustainability, but they will also lead to higher productivity and reduced inputs for farmers, thereby lowering costs,” he added.

However, according to European Commission figures, only 60% of households in rural areas have access to fast broadband (>30Mbps), compared to 86% of the total EU population.

Similarly, the share of rural residents who have at least basic digital skills was 14 percentage points lower than that of city residents in 2019 (48% vs 62%).

EU member states must submit their national strategic plans for the 2023-2027 CAP by the end of December.

According to the new rules, each member state will have to set out their own tailor-made strategy for achieving the EU’s green ambitions, of which stimulating innovation and modernisation will play a key part.

**BOTH UK, EU SHOULD MOVE FASTER**

Speaking to EURACTIV, Professor John Crawford from the University of Glasgow praised the EU Green Deal’s whole “value chain approach”, from farming all the way through to retail and consumption.

However, he said neither the UK nor the EU are moving fast enough.

Referring to the UK, he said it is very ambitious in terms of its progress but noted that farmers do not feel informed about how they are going to be supported or compensated to make this transition to a low-carbon or zero-carbon agriculture.

“So, they feel very much in the dark now. We need to make a distinction between words and action," he added.

The European Commission has said it plans to launch a carbon farming initiative by the end of 2021.

Just like British farmers, the EU agricultural sector wants clarity on how farmers will be incentivised and avoid additional burdens and costs.

But Europe’s green push in agriculture is still facing severe obstacles.

**UNFAIR TRADE DEALS**

Professor Crawford also raised the issue of trade deals and agriculture.

He said there is an ongoing debate in the UK about the new kind of trade deals post-Brexit, particularly about the fact that the UK has fairly high standards in agriculture in terms of animal or environmental welfare compared to some countries that it has trade deals with.

Echoing similar concerns in the EU, Crawford said:

“We let them import food with no tariff, so of course, they could all be cheaper, right? So, all we’re doing is destroying our own agriculture and offshoring the environmental impact.”

When it comes to carbon farming, he said, global standards are required.
Spain views carbon farming as a climate solution

By Belén Delgado | EFEAgro

Spain seeks to maintain carbon in soils destined for agriculture in its strategy against climate change with the support of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). However, producers demand more funds to compensate for their efforts.

The Spanish government and autonomous regions are negotiating a plan to implement the new CAP, which they will send to Brussels before the end of the year.

Around 40% of its budget will be allocated to actions with climate and environmental purposes. Among the new changes are eco-schemes, aid linked to sustainable practices divided between those focused on agroecology, and the so-called low carbon agriculture, which aims to reinforce the sink capacity of soils.

The government has proposed incentives for producers to incorporate extensive pasture grazing, sustainable harvests, crop rotation, direct sowing, conservation agriculture, and plant covers and uncultivated land to protect biodiversity.

The eco-schemes will be financed with €1.107 billion per year until 2027, equivalent to 23% of direct aid from the CAP (first pillar), along with another 2% charged to environmental spending in rural development (second pillar).

Although negotiations have progressed regarding direct aid under the first pillar, the measures under the second have yet to be further specified.

OBSERVATIONS TO THE NEW CAP

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Luis Planas, has reiterated that he intends to support farmers in the transition towards more sustainable agriculture from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

This article was originally published on EFEAgro. Read the article.
Agricultural organisations insist on the need to receive more support in the face of increasing environmental demands and highlight the mitigating capacity of agriculture to capture carbon and prevent it from being released into the atmosphere.

According to Ignacio López from the Spanish farmers’ association (Asaja), Spain has decided that the CAP funds serve to “compensate” the efforts of the producers, who do not see the proposal as “sufficiently attractive”.

“They ask us for more measures” that will force us to redirect investments or face higher costs “without putting more money on the table” in a context of “a lot of uncertainty,” says López to Efeagro.

He recognises the need to adopt sustainable practices and tackle problems such as soil erosion or fires.

**CARBON IN SOIL**

In the European Union (EU), the European Commission promotes its strategy “Farm to Fork”, which seeks to reduce the use of chemical pesticides by 50% and fertilisers by 20% before 2030. Additionally, it aims to expand organic farming to 25% of agricultural land.

The plan also includes a Carbon Farming Initiative and a regulatory framework for certifying carbon removals.

Representative of the COAG organisation in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Andoni García, underlines that agricultural production is responsible for greenhouse gas emissions and functions as a sink, adding organic matter to the soil.

However, he expresses his concern about the possibility that agriculture “enters the commercialisation of carbon credits and is subject to private certifications” due to the risk of speculation.

In his view, more financial support is required because it is not enough to integrate the increased costs derived from a more sustainable production into food prices, especially when “the EU is externalising these costs” by allowing the importation of low-cost products from third countries.

**PROMOTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

In Spain, with 10% of ecological agricultural land, organic farmers said that the model change would also help boost rural economies, combining job creation and economic benefits with the protection of the environment, the fight against climate change, and an improvement in animal welfare.

Meanwhile, the phytosanitary industry advocates for more investment in precision agriculture with new technologies, innovation, and appropriate legislation.

From the UPA organisation, technician David Erice believes that soil management can be significantly improved in the Iberian Peninsula with practices such as crop rotation, which “do not put the survival of farms at risk from an economic point of view”.

However, he is more critical of restrictions on the use of phytosanitary products and fertilisers and questions that “farmers are left without tools to produce”. Hence, he calls for correctly measuring the impact of the formulated objectives.

“The challenge is to be able to achieve sustainable practices that make the farms viable as a whole, and we have been working on that in recent years,” says Erice.
Carbon farming practices could help Polish farmers cope with permanent drought as they could increase the productivity of their yields, an expert has told EURACTIV Poland.

“Activities serving the purpose of using soil in a more sustainable way and increasing the amount of carbon present in it make the soil more fertile and increase its production values,” said Zbigniew Karaczun, a professor at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW) and an expert of the Polish branch of the Climate Coalition.

Such soil, he added, becomes more resistant to drought, “which in Polish conditions, with unstable weather and permanent drought in the summer season for the last ten years, can bring farmers higher yields.”

However, according to Karaczun, in Poland at the moment “there are no instruments that would support carbon farming in a broader way”.

As part of its push for greener agriculture, the European Commission has said it plans to launch a carbon farming initiative by the end of 2021. [See background below]

For Mateusz Ciasnocha, farmer and CEO of European Carbon Farmers, regenerative agriculture is a much broader concept than organic farming. European Carbon Farmers is an organisation promoting carbon farming practices in Poland and developing agricultural carbon payment mechanisms.

“Appropriate use of regenerative farming methods – and in particular understanding of how nature's cycles work, including the carbon cycle – means that at some point the system becomes organic, meaning not using artificial methods for production,” Ciasnocha told EURACTIV Poland.

He added that not enough farmers are aware that their farm is a part of the whole ecosystem. “Every farmer is a carbon farmer, whether he realises it or not.”

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“The best example is that our agriculture still relies heavily on tillage, which is a practice that has a very negative impact on the carbon cycle,” he stressed.

IS CARBON FARMING LIKELY TO DEVELOP IN POLAND?

Jerzy Plewa, former head of DG AGRI at the European Commission and Team Europe expert, told EURACTIV Poland the support for carbon farming will grow, among other reasons, because 40% of the new Common Agricultural Policy’s (CAP) budget should be allocated to pro-climate measures.

According to Plewa, carbon farming marks a return to the good practices of the past, but with a scientific approach that reinforces the positive impact of these practices on the soil.

“In the long run, farmers will benefit from improved soil quality, improved production performance and greater resilience,” he noted.

The implementation of carbon farming practices may imply the need for new investments. Plewa stressed that the additional costs for farmers are compensated under the CAP.

But farmers are not rewarded depending on the amount of carbon stored.

Plewa explained that pilot programmes have so far been launched in Europe which aim to reward farmers for tons of carbon sequestered in the soil. According to him, farmers will soon be additionally rewarded for practices based on regenerative agriculture.

“A necessary step for carbon farming in the EU will be the establishment of a legal framework for certification of sustainable carbon removal from natural ecosystems. The Commission is currently working on a draft regulation on carbon farming, and the certification mechanism is to be proposed by 2023,” he noted.

Plewa also said Poland’s CAP Strategic Plan draft provides eco-schemes typical of carbon farming, such as “simplified farming systems, diversification of crop structures and compliance with fertilisation plans”.

The Polish expert also insisted on the need to properly inform farmers about this opportunity. “The implementation of ambitious environmental-climate programs requires constant improvement of farmers’ knowledge, as well as wide support from professional advisory services, which is insufficient in our country”.

CAP HOLDS THE CARBON FARMING KEY

Plewa said Poland could make use of the CAP, which includes many possibilities to support pro-ecological and pro-climate measures, especially under the second pillar, in rural areas.

“These funds support organic farming and agri-environmental programmes, which are not commonly referred to as carbon farming, but contribute to absorbing CO2 from the air and storing it in the soil”.

However, Plewa criticised the fact that despite having the biggest budget in the EU for the rural development pillar, Poland does not fully exploit the opportunities provided in the CAP.

“It allocates fewer funds for organic farming and ambitious agri-environmental programmes and spends large sums on other objectives,” he concluded.