Between rising prices and fuel shortages, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has turned the EU agrifood sector on its head.

To cope with this crisis, the European Commission has asked member states to adapt their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) national strategic plans in consideration of the new geopolitical context.

Meanwhile, countries have also been encouraged to use derogations from environmental measures in the CAP, including an exceptional easing of rules on planting crops in ecologically sensitive areas.

In this Special Report, EURACTIV’s network looks at how 10 different member states plan to use these new flexibilities and how this could change the course of the CAP reform.

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Increasing food production in Europe is a priority in light of the Ukraine war, according to the EU’s agri-boss, who detailed how the European Commission encourages member states to do this through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

In his address to the European Parliament’s agriculture committee on Monday (4 April), Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski stood firm in his convictions that the bloc must increase food production, despite reassuring MEPs that the EU does not currently face a food security threat.

“We must act with these measures in the short term to address food security and affordability concerns now,” he said, pointing out that “we cannot predict how things will develop over the course of the year or in the near future”, he said.

It is “simply prudent that we support our farmers to produce more food while they can,” the EU agriculture Commissioner said. [EPA-EFE]

To help member states achieve this, the Commissioner offered further details on the actions envisaged by the EU executive.

Notably, Wojciechowski called on member states to take their “new geopolitical contexts into account” in
their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) national strategic plans (see below for more details).

Last week, the Commission sent observation letters to the 19 member states who submitted their plans on time. The letter focuses on the strengths and weaknesses in each plan, suggesting areas for improvement.

These letters also encouraged EU countries to revise their plans to reinforce elements to strengthen the sector’s resilience and self-reliance in light of the war.

“Those plans were peacetime plans. And now it’s wartime,” he explained.

As such, these plans should be adapted to have a stronger focus on the resilience of farming sectors, he explained.

“We now expect that the 19 member states to address the observations and submit a revised version of the plans,” the Commissioner explained.

However, precisely what this means in practice is open to interpretation by member states, although the Commission has previously put forward several suggestions, including increasing biogas production.

Another way the Commission hopes to increase production is by easing rules on several environmental measures. This includes a derogation permitting farmers to plant crops in ecological focus areas.

According to the Commissioner, this is an “exceptional and temporary derogation to allow the production of any crops on fallow land this year, while maintaining the full level of greening payments for farmers,” the Commissioner said.

In the latest Commission’s trade outlook, these new measures should increase usable land for growing grains, positively affecting the EU’s output for arable crops.

Meanwhile, some member states are using other flexibilities to alter existing import requirements related to pesticides for animal feed.

However, some MEPs expressed concerns over the plans, which have also caused disquiet among environmental campaign groups.

“We’re looking at four million hectares being set aside next year. Is that really something we should do?” centre-right MEP Christine Schneider queried while leftist Luke Flanagan called for an impact assessment on the effects of such a derogation.

Addressing the concerns, the Commissioner conceded that, looking to the future, this “might not be a one-off solution only for this year” but stressed that the measure is “obviously necessary”.

“I’m going to push and insist that it’s extremely important in terms of security,” he maintained, adding the EU executive will be “keeping an eye on the situation [and] there might be some new needs”.

Meanwhile, the Commission has triggered its crisis reserve fund for the first time, adopting exceptional support measures of €500 million to directly assist farmers most affected by the higher input costs and the closure of export markets.

Member states can exceptionally opt to complement this EU support by up to 200% with national funds.

The Commission will also allow member states to pay increased CAP direct payments in advance to address the cash flow difficulties that farmers face.

To get the ball rolling, the EU’s farming boss urged agriculture MEPs to encourage their colleagues in the budget committee to agree on the activation as soon as possible so that member states can start getting the exceptional support measures.

He added that the EU executive “will have to consider new approaches” if the crisis continues.

BACKGROUND

National strategic plans (NSPs) are one of the main novelties of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which will run from 2023-2027.

Through these plans, EU countries detail how they will meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP while responding to the needs of farmers and rural communities.

In other words: While the European Commission will be setting out the general direction of the future CAP, the “how” will be up to national administrations this time.

Member states had until the end of 2021 to submit their national plans to the Commission for its approval, a process which is currently underway.

For more information on the CAP reform, see EURACTIV’s coverage.
The debate over scrapping environmental measures to produce more food and mitigate problems caused by the Ukraine war has split German policymakers and so far, federal and regional governments have not been able to find a middle ground.

In a meeting on Friday (1 April), Germany’s federal and regional agriculture ministers failed to reach a consensus on whether feed or food production should be temporarily allowed in so-called ecological focus areas.

Usually, farmers are not allowed to cultivate these areas in an effort to boost biodiversity and climate protection. In Germany’s federal system, both the federal and the state governments would have to agree to ease the restrictions.

After Friday’s meeting ended without an agreement on a joint position ahead of the formal legislative process, the regional representatives are now set to vote on the matter on 8 April.

In response to the war in Ukraine, which is a major exporter of key foodstuffs such as wheat or oilseeds, the European Commission proposed in its recent communication on food...
security that member states should allow feed production and the use of pesticides on fallow lands in order to ensure sufficient domestic food production.

**NO PESTICIDES IN PROTECTED AREAS**

For Germany’s Green-led agriculture ministry, however, the EU executive’s proposals go too far.

In a statement, it said that allowing the use of pesticides on protected areas would be counterproductive for the achievement of the green goals set out in the EU’s flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork strategy.

Instead, Agriculture Minister Cem Özdemir has proposed allowing fallow lands to be temporarily used for feed while still banning the use of pesticides and the cultivation of food crops.

This would help make Germany more autonomous in terms of feed supply while avoiding the protected areas being ploughed, he told journalists after last week’s meeting.

Ploughing would destroy much of the progress made on biodiversity and release the CO2 stored in the soil, while the gain in terms of food production would be minimal, he added.

Many federal regions, however, take a different view and have called for Germany to fully implement what the Commission has proposed, or even go further and allow all agricultural production on fallow lands.

**THORNY DEBATES**

According to Peter Hauck, the conservative minister of the south-western region of Baden-Württemberg, fallow lands “do not make a key contribution to stopping the climate crisis.”

However, they could be “used to produce food for 10 million people,” he said after the meeting.

Even after talks were prolonged by several hours, the ministers remained split and seemed unwilling to budge on the issue.

“I have never experienced such thorny discussions before,” Social Democrat minister Till Backhaus from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania said.

When the regional governments meet again on Friday to formally vote on the matter in the second chamber of parliament, the Bundesrat, they will have the chance to make amendments to what the federal government has proposed.

Backhaus was optimistic that those regions that want to allow more production would manage to have the Bundesrat greenlight the amendments they seek.

“We already have a majority among the federal states,” he said.

Despite all the differences, however, there is still a basic consensus between the federal and regional ministers on EU green goals, with Hauck stressing that “absolutely nobody among us questions the Common Agricultural Policy, the Green Deal, or the Farm to Fork Strategy”.

The European Commission had recently deferred several legislative proposals, including the Sustainable Use of Pesticides regulation (SUR) and the nature restoration targets, meant to implement the EU’s flagship strategy for sustainable food production due to the war in Ukraine.
Representatives of the largest agricultural organisations of the four Visegrad Group states and five other countries have jointly called for a temporary postponement of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, as well as of other environmental measures.

The joint statement, published on 1 April, was co-signed by representatives of the largest agricultural organisations of the Visegrad Group – Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – together with their counterparts from Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Croatia, and Estonia.

Representatives of these national associations met in Bratislava last week to discuss the future of European agriculture in connection with Russia’s aggression in Ukraine.

Stressing concerns over the issues facing the countries on the border of Ukraine over the next few months, the statement warned that farmers in these areas expect difficulties in preparing for the new CAP programming period.

As such, the farmers are calling for “adjustments or temporary postponement” of all production restrictions.

“Therefore, we request the postponement of the implementation of the new CAP by one year,” the farmers’ representatives urged in the statement, adding that current...
conditions would practically undermine the green architecture of the CAP reform, thereby burying the objectives of the EU’s flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork strategy.

The statement also called on the European Commission to grant temporary exemptions for conditionalities, including the greening and agri-environment-climate measures in the second pillar of the farming subsidies policy.

The farmers’ associations also stressed the need to reconsider the timing of the objectives of the Europe Green Deal, citing a reduction in the consumption of pesticides, and fertilisers, an increase in non-productive areas and an increase in organic farming.

Meanwhile, the creation of a regulatory framework for carbon farming should also be postponed, they maintained.

“We urge the European Commission to take our requirements into account when implementing measures to promote food security as well as in the process of evaluating CAP strategic plans,” the joint statement said.

The statement added to mounting calls from member states for a reconsideration of the CAP reform – which is due to run from 2023 to 2027 – in light of the Ukraine war.

Most recently, the Slovak government has called for adjusting the CAP, including a policy postponement and a reconsideration of the EU’s green ambitions, amid fears of food insecurity caused by the war in Ukraine.

The Slovak agricultural ministry (MPRV) told EURACTIV Slovakia in March that it believes it will be “necessary to reconsider and partially correct” the objectives of the EU’s flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, and the Biodiversity Strategy given the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and the “apparent impact of severely limited agri-food trade (mainly imports) on EU agriculture”.

“The most important thing is to ensure food security,” a spokesperson for the ministry told EURACTIV at the time.

In doing so, the Slovak agriculture ministry added its voice to a growing list of those calling on the European Commission to make changes to the EU’s flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, together with the Biodiversity Strategy.

The government also wants to increase the percentage of coupled payments for the strategic productions for which the EU is not self-sufficient, such as vegetable proteins and cereals.

Although there were initial signs that the Commission may consider this option, it has since been firmly rejected by the EU executive.
Greek agri minister: Ukraine war to shake up Greek CAP plan

By Georgia-Evangelia Karagianni | EURACTIV.gr

Languages: French | German | Greek

Greece is planning to reshape its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plan in light of the Ukraine war to strengthen resilience and expand farmers’ finance and risk management tools, Georgios Georgantas told EURACTIV Greece in an interview.

Georgios Georgantas is the Greek minister for agriculture and rural development.

The plans, which set out the ways in which EU countries intend to meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP, have undergone the first stages of evaluation from the European Commission.

The executive recently sent the first batch of observation letters to member states, including Greece, with their initial comments. The comments heavily emphasised the states’ need to adapt to the changing situation in Europe following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February.

Can you give us an overview of some of the comments received on Greece’s national strategic plan?

These comments focus mainly on the need to adapt the strategic plans of all member states to the new circumstances created by the...
war in Ukraine, since when they were submitted, this event with its significant consequences, including in the agri-food sector, had not yet occurred.

Comments also focus on the issues of increased environmental concern and more effective linking of the policy measures contained in our strategic plan, and also on coupled aid.

**Have there been any discussions about changes, or even additions, to your plans to help deal with the war in Ukraine?**

The war in Ukraine has triggered the political reflexes of both our government and the EU so that we can immediately and effectively provide sustainable solutions to critical issues.

These include topics such as energy autonomy and renewable energy, the reduction of input costs via investments in new and digital technologies, promoting the collective organisation of producers to strengthen their position in the value chain and expanding financial and risk management tools to protect producers’ income in relation to unforeseen exogenous crises, including economic, environmental and epidemiological etc.

It is precisely these possibilities that we intend to expand and integrate into our strategic plan in order to further strengthen our producers’ support toolbox under the new CAP.

**How does Greece intend to use the new flexibilities recently granted by the Commission, including derogations from environmental measures?**

There is a strong concern at the European level about the ‘green orientation’ of agriculture under conditions of questioning of the EU’s food security and sufficiency due to the war in Ukraine, a criticism which I must admit was already present and had been expressed by producers at the public consultation stage of the strategic plans.

This demonstrates the need to ensure the balanced pursuit of the objectives of the new CAP in relation to its economic, environmental and social ambitions.

A holistic development approach is therefore required, in which agriculture and the environment will work in a complementary way to achieve sustainable production conditions and ensure food sufficiency and security, making use of all the financial instruments and tools, both EU and national, which we have already activated to support our producers in this difficult situation.

**One issue that has been of particular concern to the agri-food sector is food security. As far as Greece is concerned, do we have food security?**

There is no food security issue in Greece. We took all the necessary measures in time to deal with the risk. We helped to overcome bureaucratic obstacles so that we could cover imports from Russia and Ukraine through alternative markets. By recording stocks every five days we prevent any speculation on the market.

At the same time, we are encouraging an increase in the production of soft wheat and corn by including these products in the coupled aid scheme, as well as cultivation on holdings declared for fallow or greening, without losing the privileges provided for by these programmes.

Likewise, sunflower oil producers have assured me that they will increase their cultivation so that there will be no problem in this direction either, although stocks are sufficient even if we don’t import a single litre for five months.

**And how do you see the wider picture?**

We have covered the imports of corn and soft wheat from countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and France, as far as the EU is concerned, and from Canada as far as non-EU countries are concerned.

There is no problem of sufficiency and there will not be a problem. The battle is being fought at the price level so that prices can be contained and start to fall. I believe that because of sufficiency the market self-regulation mechanisms are starting to work and we will soon see positive results.
While the war in Ukraine continues, French farmers are permitted to cultivate fallow land in order to increase production. The question now is whether the direction of the new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will also be affected. EURACTIV France reports.

In light of the Ukraine war, and in recognition of its position as a global exporter of agricultural raw materials, France must “assume Europe’s role as a provider of food,” French agriculture minister Julien Denormandie said during a press conference back at the outbreak of the war. He has since repeatedly urged farmers to increase production.

For this aim, the European Commission has approved a derogation in environmental measures to allow the cultivation, mowing and grazing of areas left fallow for ecological purposes.

According to EU Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski, this is an “exceptional and temporary derogation to allow the production of any crops on fallow land this year, while maintaining the full level of greening payments for farmers.”

In France, fallow land covers about 300,000 hectares, which can now be used to grow spring cereals, oilseeds and pulses. Only fallow land with beehives is not affected by these derogations. [Shutterstock / Simon Travels]
In France, fallow land covers about 300,000 hectares, which can now be used to grow spring cereals, oilseeds and pulses. Only fallow land with beehives is not affected by these derogations.

However, this short-term exemption is not to everyone’s liking.

Green MP Benoît Biteau said in a press release that this corresponds to 2% of French arable land, which is a maximum production potential of 2.6 million tonnes of wheat.

This is probably much less because the land concerned is not very productive and not easy to cultivate, he explained. This is therefore a “long way from the orders of the magnitude needed,” he said.

**HOW WILL THIS IMPACT FRANCE’S CAP PLAN?**

Looking to the long term, the question now is how France will look to alter its approach to its CAP strategic plan in light of the recent developments.

Through these plans, which were submitted to the European Commission before the war in Ukraine, EU countries set out how they intend to meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP.

France received a letter from the EU executive on 31 March, in which it stated numerous shortcomings of its plan.

The letter criticised, in particular, a lack of “environmental ambition” and the application of so-called eco-schemes, – incentives paid to farmers who voluntarily adhere to environmentally friendly practices, decided at the state level.

These regulatory concerns highlighted by the Commission are difficult to circumvent meaning, for the past few days, associations have been pressuring the government to review its national strategic plan in depth.

On set-aside land in particular, the associations fear that France will prolong their cultivation in the future. In the new strategic plan, there is – for now – an obligation to have non-productive areas, including set-aside land, cover 4-7% of the land used.

However, the issue of fallow land will be brought up for “discussion in due time” by the EU’s agriculture commissioner, Denormandie told a press conference following the EU Agrifish Council on 7 April. In other words: nothing has been decided, yet.

Another key issue raised is that eco-schemes, the new voluntary system rewarding farmers for their environmental practices, in the French plan reward organic and High Environmental Value (HVE) certified crops in the same way.

However, the HVE label has been criticised since the beginning of its integration into the national plan, as its specifications are much less restrictive than those of organic farming.

This departure from the principle of cross-compliance of aid, which is particularly reinforced in the new CAP, is now likely to be reviewed by the government.

According to Mathieu Courgeau, Pour une autre PAC president, this cross-compliance is one of the “points that concern the regulations and that will have to be changed in the NSP. France has no choice.”

“The Commission cannot write a blank cheque,” he stressed.

**ELECTIONS LOOMING**

Knowing what will happen to the national strategic plan is difficult, however, particularly in light of Sunday’s (24 April) presidential election, in which incumbent Emmanuel Macron and far-right leader Marine Le Pen are to face off each other.

If Macron is re-elected, the ministry will maintain “the objective of validating the NSP by summer,” the French ministry told EURACTIV. If not, things are less certain.

While France prepares its corrections to the national plan, the agriculture and food ministry told EURACTIV that “each of the Commission’s observations will be studied”, “after having consulted the stakeholders”.

“The context of the war in Ukraine, by putting the imperative of food sovereignty back in the spotlight, is also impacting, along the way, the process of examining NSPs in the middle of the procedure,” the ministry explained.

However, for the Pour une autre PAC collective, expectations are low. “We cannot unravel the NSP any more than that. We can’t do less,” Courgeau said.
The EU countryside is facing the most challenging moment of the century, the Spanish Minister of Agriculture Luis Planas told EURACTIV’s partner EFE Agro, adding that Spain aims to secure food supply while guarding its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plan’s green ambitions.

“We lived for a few years with markets that worked like clockwork from a logistical point of view until 2020. First, because of COVID-19 and then with the war, we live the most difficult moment, and the big question is how we can fix this together, with a spirit of lending hands,” the minister said.

As the war in Ukraine – an important supplier for Spain – created a new “uncertainty factor”, Planas said guaranteeing agricultural production is a “priority” but “without losing the circular orientation” of economies and, in particular, agri-food production.

A reverse trend, according to the minister, “would lead to the depletion of available resources on the planet.”

The minister stressed his focus is on ensuring food supply, accounting for rising energy prices, decreased production, and the effects of the war
on blocking exports via the Black Sea, while also maintaining the strategic course of “producing more with fewer natural resources.”

“It is not a dilemma because we are clear about where we are heading, and this is the noting that in 2050 around 10 billion people will need to be fed by an agricultural area that will “hardly” grow and a herd of cattle that is not going to increase.

CAP PLAN, THE ‘MOST IMPORTANT DESIGN’

The European Commission sent back the first evaluation of the Spanish CAP national strategic plan for 2023-2027 on 31 March.

Through these plans, EU countries set out how they intend to meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP.

Planas called it the “most important design” for Spanish farming since the stabilisation plan of 1959, back before the EU farming subsidies programme existed.

To meet this growing challenge, Spain will bet on innovation and digitisation and technologies such as gene editing to increase production “in a sustainable way”, Planas said.

Spain will receive €47.724 million from the 2023-2027 CAP budget, rising to €55 million with additional support from the Next Generation EU, the temporary instrument designed to boost the bloc's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, Brussels has recommended that Spain change the plan to increase the environmental effort and consider the new situation due to the war in Ukraine.

Spain hopes to meet the deadlines and will ask the EC to approve the final version of the strategic plan in the first half of 2022 to give farmers some certainty ahead of the autumn planting.

LATEST DECISIONS

During the most recent meeting of the EU agriculture ministers in Luxembourg, member states agreed to communicate data on private stocks of grains and oilseeds meant as a first step to creating a European emergency agricultural reserve.

Planas welcomed this and pointed out that although the food supply is guaranteed, Spanish consumers notice increasing prices.

The Spanish Consumer Price Index (CPI) for March rose by 6.8% year-on-year, with edible oil prices (+32.1%) skyrocketing.

The Spanish Government has complemented EU measures against the crisis in Ukraine with a royal decree-law, within the framework of the CAP national plan, to respond to the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine.

This plan includes €93.47 million for the agricultural and livestock sector.
Croatia has made ensuring food security a key focus in light of the crisis in Ukraine, rolling out a number of measures to help producers cope with the fallout from the war. EURACTIV Croatia reports.

Since the beginning of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, which has sent food systems globally into disarray, Croatia’s ministry of agriculture has been focused on the protection of the agrifood sector.

At an extraordinary video meeting of EU agriculture ministers in early March on the consequences of the conflict, Croatian agriculture minister Marija Vučković said it was high time to step up emergency measures, warning of the impact of rising energy, fertiliser, transport, animal feed and other costs.

Expressing her sympathy for the current situation in Ukraine in light of the Croatian experience of the 1991-1995 Homeland War, the minister vowed to “take care of the food security of our citizens.”

As such, Croatia is preparing for all possible measures to be taken during this period, she said, pointing out that it is citizens who will have to bear the brunt of these extra costs.

“We need to think seriously about the possible consequences of increased demand on the EU market,
but we will not abandon the principle of EU solidarity or solidarity with Ukraine,” she said, stressing the need to preempt disruption.

**EMERGENCY MEASURES**

The Croatian government has adopted a number of measures designed to ensure the security of the market supply of food products and assistance to producers, as well as measures to help end customers and citizens with the possible expansion of measures.

For now, the margin and the frozen price of “blue diesel” for agriculture and fishermen have been reduced.

Croatia has also set aside 200 million kunas (just over €25.5 million) of intervention aid to individual farmers for the purchase of artificial fertiliser for spring sowing, while 75 million kunas (€10 million) have been earmarked to help fishermen. The fisheries sector will also be provided with additional compensatory measures.

Speaking before the Croatian Parliament in April, the minister said that agricultural production in the country has been making progress in recent years, stating that the amendments to the Law on Agricultural Land and the drafting of the country’s CAP strategic plan will continue to provide support to farmers.

Through these plans, EU countries set out how they intend to meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP.

The ministry also put forward a proposal to enable member states to make full use of all available funds within their existing rural development programs, which was subsequently supported by 13 member countries.

**CURRENT STATE OF PLAY**

The state secretary of the ministry of agriculture, Zdravko Tušek, said that serious disturbances in the meat and animal market are slowly subsiding, but warned that prices in the pig sector are historically low.

“In the last two years, we have intervened with a tender worth more than 170 million kunas (€22.6 million) in order to reduce the negative impact on the most endangered agricultural sectors,” he said.

The calculation on animal welfare has also been changed, based on which an additional 200 million kuna (€26.6 million) will be used to help the livestock sector, which has been most affected by COVID-19 and Ukraine crises.

Meanwhile, the ministry is also working on measures that would enable the sustainability of the dairy sector until the end of the decade.

Continuity of financing of long-term investments in dairy cattle breeding – just over 490 million (€65 million) kuna per year – is planned in order to strengthen the competitiveness of investments in dairy farms and product labelling.

The ministry intervened through small value aid in the amount of 200 million kunas (€26.6 million) for up to 20 hectares of agricultural land from which areas under meadows, pastures and fallow land are excluded.

“For the first 10 hectares, support of 450 kunas per hectare (€60) was provided, from 10 to 20 ha additional HRK 250/hectare (€33),” said Tugomir Majdak, state secretary, stating that this measure will cover a total of more than 88,000 farms.

Through the rural development programme, tenders are being prepared for investments in storage capacities of cereals and oilseeds, as well as investments to support producer organisations and irrigation, Majdak added.
As one of the EU’s leading agricultural producers, Romania is mobilising to fill some of the gaps left by Russian and Ukrainian exporters. EURACTIV Romania explores how the war is reshaping the country’s agricultural priorities.

The conflict has severely disrupted the EU agri-food sector but particularly left its mark in Romania, which borders Ukraine.

This has placed Romania at the forefront of filling some of the gaps left by Russian and Ukrainian exporters.

According to agriculture minister Adrian Chesnoiu, while Romania has already included provisions to improve the resilience of its sector, the country intends to go one step further.

“Many of the things we caught in [the CAP plan] also relate to the associated risks. Before the war came, we already had the energy and gas crisis, with an impact on the results,” he told EURACTIV Romania.

The plan, which details the way in which Romania intends to meet
the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), was submitted to Brussels just days after Russia invaded Ukraine, but prepared prior to the invasion.

The government is now reconsidering its approach to the plan and Romania’s agricultural strategy is likely to be significantly influenced in light of the war in Ukraine.

Romania is especially pushing on food processing, earmarking specific funding to increase its capacity in this area.

“In order to ensure the necessary food, you have to process the raw material,” Chesnoiu pointed out.

Meanwhile, according to Sorin Moise, secretary of state in the ministry of agriculture, the areas that are cultivated with sunflower in several areas of Romania will be larger than last year.

For example, a strong group of farmers from the Mureș area, in the central part of the country, have taken the decision to reorientate themselves away from sugar beet crops after the closure of the sugar factory in Luduș, owned by the French group Tereos, to instead grow sunflowers.

The group is now aiming to set up the largest sunflower processing factory in Romania.

Moise added that Romania remains supportive of discussions on food security taking place on a larger scale throughout the EU, as well as decisions to approve a derogation from planting crops in areas left fallow for biodiversity.

“For now, there is no cause for concern. But we need to be very careful and see if we can afford to leave 4% of our farmland uncultivated for the rest if we can afford to reduce the number of fertilisers and pesticides and if the application of these measures will not adversely affect cereal production and, implicitly, ensuring the agri-food security of the EU citizens,” he warned.

For his part, Renew MEP Alin Mituța, stressed that Romania should push on producing more protein crops due to the impact of the conflict on cereals used for animal feed.

“We import into the EU a very large amount of protein crops for animals, soybeans, for example... I think we need to develop in the European Union the capacity to produce these protein crops, and Romania has a great potential to do so,” Mituța said.

Another example given by the MEP was the development of alternatives to natural gas fertilisers, something that is especially important in the context of rising gas prices and the need to reduce the EU’s reliance on fossil fuels from Russia.

Despite being one of the largest natural gas producers in the EU, Romania has been severely affected by problems in the fertiliser sector as the largest chemical fertiliser producers in Romania have stopped production either due to legal issues or the high price of gas.

A move to adapt Romania’s strategy to this new reality has been actively encouraged by the European Commission.

For example, speaking during a recent meeting, Mariusz Stefan Migas, head of unit and the European Commission’s Directorate-General for agriculture (DG AGRI), said that these national strategic plans may require amendment to include elements referring to the situation in Ukraine and the implications of the conflict on the EU agri-food industry.

This may include placing an increased focus on sunflower production or opportunities in the field of renewable energy production, he suggested.
The Bulgarian government will allocate a record €560 million budget to ensure the country’s food security in light of the war in Ukraine, but the country’s agriculture minister has warned this is still insufficient to support the ailing sector.

According to Bulgarian agriculture minister Ivan Ivanov, this unprecedented sum of money is designed to help the sector deal with the fallout of the war in Ukraine which has seen prices for feed, fertilisers and gas soar.

The minister specified that €40.33 million will be allocated for livestock farmers and bee colonies, with €32.93 million for fruit and vegetables, rice and roses. He added that the procedure will be eased and accelerated as much as possible so that farmers can receive the money quickly.

The aid, which represents the biggest change in the government’s agricultural policy in response to the conflict, will also go towards buying wheat and sunflower seeds at prices ranging from €285 per tonne without VAT for wheat and up to €710 per tonne for sunflower farm seeds.

**TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE**

However, Bulgarian farmers who keep the largest areas sown with grain...
are not happy with the support.

Kostadin Kostadinov, chairman of the National Association of Grain Producers, pointed out that the grain producers in Bulgaria were supported neither by the Covid aid, nor by the 60/40 measure of the National Employment Agency.

Meanwhile, farmers have also reserved criticism for the government’s slow response in adapting its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plan to the new circumstances.

Through these plans, EU countries set out how they intend to meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP. However, these were drawn up prior to the Ukraine war.

Speaking at the meeting of agriculture ministers at a meeting in Luxembourg on 7 April, the minister Ivanov said that measures taken by the European Commission to provide emergency support and relief to farmers are a good first step.

However, he conceded that the support package announced for the sector, together with the Commission’s temporary crisis framework for state aid, will not be enough in view of the threats to the sustainability of the whole food chain and the absolute unpredictability of developments.

In particular, he singled out Bulgaria’s heavy reliance on imports of raw and white sugar as a notable concern, pointing out that some alternative sources of sugar, including Moldova, are currently uncertain.

“In this market environment, the main direction to ensure sugar consumption in Bulgaria is the processing of raw cane sugar for refining. That is why Bulgaria would like to regulate preferential access to raw materials for refineries in sugar beet deficit member states,” the minister explained.

As such, he stressed that Bulgaria continues to push for a separate aid scheme with further flexibility, similar to the one the Commission set up to tackle the first wave of the COVID pandemic.

However, the minister assured on 16 April that Bulgaria is expected to have a good harvest of both autumn and spring crops. He specified that the data on the development of wheat, rapeseed, and other crops were good, with farmers taking care of their future production and no drastic increase in prices expected.

**CAP PLAN**

Despite prospects of a good harvest, Bulgaria has been proactive in embracing the derogations to CAP environmental measures exceptionally permitted by the European Commission, including the possibility to plant crops on fallow land.

According to its ministry, Bulgaria will make full use of all derogations open to them and encourage farmers to use all available capacity for food and feed production.

According to Kostadinov, roughly 5% of land in Bulgaria is left for ecological purposes.

According to him, about 2-3% of this area will be used for production, which will cover the deficit due to the war in Ukraine as it is accountable for 30% of the world’s production of grain.

This year, he said, farmers will sow more sunflower crops. However, the difference from last year will not
Italy is looking at the possibility of “reorienting” its national strategic plan to implement the EU’s farming subsidies programme to support strategic agricultural production in response to the economic consequences of the Ukraine war.

At the end of March, the European Commission sent its observation letter on Italy’s national strategic plan, reproaching Rome in particular for its distribution of subsidies – considered unbalanced in favour of the livestock farms of the Po Valley – and lack of ambition in terms of environmental protection.

Through these plans, EU countries set out how they intend to meet the nine EU-wide objectives of the reformed CAP. Italy’s agriculture ministry expects to transmit an updated version of its plan by the end of July.

Even before the initial evaluation from Brussels, however, agriculture Minister Stefano Patuanelli said that while considering the CAP reform “the best possible balance point,” it is necessary “to think about a postponed entry into force of the new CAP, perhaps having 2023 as a further year of transition to face the current emergency” linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

When first put forward by Patuanelli in March, the idea of flexible entry into force of the CAP reform raised a few eyebrows among
the other bloc’s agriculture ministers.

He then clarified that Italy’s request involved an adjustment to the plans for 2023 only to safeguard the Green Deal objectives in farming.

According to Patuanelli, granting greater flexibility in 2023 as happened in 2021-22 during the pandemic could prevent the need for structural changes to national strategic plans, which would then apply to the entire CAP programming period until 2027.

**NO STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

“I am personally convinced that we should not retreat from the challenging objectives of the new CAP and therefore that, instead of thinking about a structural modification of the Strategic Plans, a suspension of the entry into force of the new regulations should be considered,” Putuanelli said.

According to him, the government guidelines to tackle the crisis are two, namely “a series of emergency interventions to support liquidity and reduce company costs” and the “acceleration of the implementation of the National Recovery Plan (NRP), to ensure energy diversification of companies and strengthen the efficiency of the supply chains.”

The ministry of agriculture has allocated €60 million to renegotiate the loans of agricultural companies and support those most affected by the consequences of the war and has introduced a tax credit for the purchase of fuel.

On the acceleration of the NRP, Patuanelli said that “the central element is energy diversification”. On 25 March, the minister signed a decree-law relating to solar energy parks on farms.

The plan allocates €1.5 billion to support the installation of photovoltaic panels on the roofs of agricultural buildings, which will allow Italian agri-companies to reduce the cost of their bills and become increasingly self-sufficient in the energy field.

“The target to be achieved is the installation of panels for a total power of 375,000 kW, thus helping to support the energy diversification process, now more necessary than ever for the entire national production system”, Patuanelli added.

**FARMERS’ REQUESTS**

The effects of the conflict in Ukraine prompted Italian farmers to ask the government to change the national CAP plan.

On March 8, Agrinsieme, an association that brings together different farmers’ organisations, stated that “it is urgent to protect the national production potential, specifically for the arable sector, and rethink some European choices in the energy field.”

The coordinator of the association, Massimilano Giansanti, explained that “looking at the community horizon, we believe that the adoption of the new CAP should be temporarily suspended, as well as the greening obligation; in the same way, an extension of the implementation of the Farm to Fork strategy would be necessary, revising it in the light of today’s situation.”

Ettore Prandini, the president of Coldiretti, the largest organisation of Italian farmers, said that “with the extraordinary interventions decided by the EU Commission, 200 thousand hectares of land can be recovered in Italy for cultivation for an additional production of about 15 million quintals of corn for farms, durum wheat for pasta and soft wheat for bread making necessary to reduce dependence on foreign countries.”

Prandini also put forward proposals for revision of the recognition of genome editing technology, the reduction of VAT on food, and the renegotiation of the debt of entrepreneurs with a public guarantee.

Prandini also put forward proposals for revision of the recognition of genome editing technology, the reduction of VAT on food, and the renegotiation of the debt of entrepreneurs with a public guarantee.
Poland is moving to adapt its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plan to place a stronger focus on food security and crisis relief, while remaining committed to the objectives of the Green Deal. EURACTIV Poland reports.

Through the recently submitted national strategic plans for the 2023-2027 CAP reform, EU member states have detailed how they will meet the policy’s nine EU-wide objectives to respond to the needs of farmers and rural communities.

The European Commission recently gave feedback to the member states that have submitted the first drafts of their national plans, one of which is Poland. In its comments, the executive stressed the importance of prioritising food security following instability caused by Russia’s recent aggression on Ukraine.

Responding to the feedback, Poland’s minister of agriculture Henryk Kowalczyk said that he recognises that “conditions” which

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have originally shaped the Polish strategic plan have changed vastly.

As such, the plan needs to be reviewed and improved, he said.

Kowalczyk also welcomed many of the Commission’s other recommendations, such as increasing focus on renewable energy sources and – in particular – utilising more natural fertiliser in agriculture, admitting that such measures were “under-appreciated” before the war and the crisis that ensued.

**CRISIS RELIEF FOR POLISH FARMERS**

It is, however, crisis relief, based upon the temporary emergency framework, that has taken centre stage in Poland’s efforts in the past few weeks.

On 6 April, Poland’s agriculture department put forward to the Commission a support scheme to help farmers cover increasing costs, driven primarily by fertiliser price hikes. For example, the price of ammonium nitrate – a popular fertiliser – has increased by as much as 130% on the Polish market.

The scheme is valued at €836 million. Farmers are entitled to 500 polish złoty (roughly €107) for every hectare of agricultural land and 250 polish złoty (€53.50) per hectare of grassland and pasture, up to 50 hectares.

This limit is designed to target the scheme towards helping primarily small and medium farmsteads, which have been a focus of the Polish national strategic plan.

Meanwhile, the Polish government also introduced a temporary lifting of the ban on using fallow land for growing crops, as exceptionally permitted by the Commission for this year.

This measure, also permitted by the temporary emergency framework, will allow the country’s farmers to utilise an additional 4 million hectares of land that was previously off-limits.

On top of growing crops and feed, farmers will be allowed to use crop protection products in ecological focus areas (EFAs), with the exception of land, used to produce honey.

Deputy minister of agriculture Krzysztof Ciecióra has since stressed that the derogation on enabling production on EFAs should be extended by another year.

**STILL COMMITTED TO THE GREEN CAUSE**

However, while some short-term goals have been overshadowed by the urgent need to increase food and energy security in the bloc, Poland remains committed to the goals of the Green Deal, according to minister Kowalczyk.

Speaking at the TOGETAIR 2022 climate summit, he stressed that despite food production being important given the consequences of the war in Ukraine, climate protection is still an important factor in agricultural policy.

The minister added that more incentives for ecological farming will be introduced in the future and that eco-schemes will see an increase in funding.