With its flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork strategy, and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the EU is currently in a defining period for the future of its agrifood sector.

From slashing the use and risk of pesticides to a concerted push on organic, the European Union is undertaking a number of measures designed to create a greener and more sustainable sector.

But the ramifications of the decisions taken at the EU level do not stop at its borders.

In this Special Report, EURACTIV takes a closer look at how decisions taken in the EU may spill over into Africa and, more specifically, how this could impact small-scale African farmers.

This report is available in French and German.
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EU pushes on organic ‘opportunity’ for African farmers but market access remains low

By Natasha Foote | EURACTIV.com

The EU’s push on organic farming could have ripple effects across Africa, but only if African farmers have equal access to the European Market as well as the skills and resources to capitalise on this, stakeholders have told EURACTIV.

Between the ambition to triple the amount of land farmed organically in the EU by 2030, as outlined in the EU’s flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, and a new organic action plan, it is no secret that organic is front and centre of the European Commission’s priorities when it comes to agriculture.

As it currently stands, only 0.2% of agricultural land in Africa is cultivated in organic farming.

Meanwhile, Africa’s participation in organic exports is still marginal, with an annual value of around €34 billion in 2017, despite strong growth in demand in Europe.

But this could change in the wake of the EU’s push on organic farming, according to African agricultural stakeholders.

Stressing the heavy impact EU policies have on the continent, Gabriel Uri, a Kenyan agronomist and farmer,
told EURACTIV that he sees the EU’s push on organic as a “very good thing”.

“There’s still a lot of room for expansion here for growing,” he said, pointing out that much of land in the continent is still under-utilised land.

But while organic farming is a “good narrative”, it remains “more theoretical than practical” for the moment, he cautioned.

This is due to a number of constraints, he pointed out, not least of which are concerns over yield losses.

“Practically, I haven’t seen [organic farming] work so well here,” Uri said, adding that, at the moment, farmers can lose up to 50% of their yields upon converting to organic.

As such, African farmers often “gain more on costs but not on cost price,” he said.

However, he said that many farmers could still be interested in converting to organic – provided that the price is right.

“One thing you realise with farmers is that [they] are willing to go the extra mile, as long as they will see the benefits. So if the narrative is pushed, more farmers will adopt it,” he said.

But this can only happen with a guaranteed market, he warned.

“Once they are guaranteed of the market, they don’t mind the extra investment,” he pointed out.

Likewise, Elizabeth Nsimadala, president of the pan-Africa farmers’ organisation (PAFO) and the head of Eastern Africa farmers federation (EAFF), both of whom represent millions of African farmers, told EURACTIV that organic farming could become a “new core” of the EU-Africa relationship.

However, she stressed that African farmers still need to get a “fair bargaining power to have equal access to the European Market”, pointing out that the European market is currently dominated by China and Latin American countries.

SMALL FARMERS COULD MISS OUT

However, there are also concerns that small farmers, in particular, may not be able to capitalise on this opportunity.

One reason is that in order to gain access to the EU market and fetch the higher prices for organic produce, farmers must prove they farm in accordance with EU standards.

However, certification can be prohibitively expensive for small scale farmers, Uri pointed out.

“It’s not easy, it’s not easy at all, so small scale farmers don’t manage that. But large scale [producers] are able to do it because they fetch higher prices,” he said, adding that the only way to do this is to organise into groups for the export of organic produce.

Access to finance to help small farmers cover extra costs is also in short supply, according to PAFO’s Nsimadala, who pointed out that many African countries “do not have formal systems of financial support to farmers to allow them to develop and maintain their agricultural production”.

“Although there are now several micro-finance groups working in this area, very few farmers have access to their financial services and when they do, for most of them, the interests on loans are very high,” she said.

“All these obstacles prevent African farmers, especially smallholders, to obtain the required certification and complying with EU organic regulations,” she stressed.
Kenya divided over pesticides ban to align with EU Green Deal

By Benjamin Fox | EURACTIV.com

The Kenyan farming community is divided over efforts by lawmakers to bring their regulations on pesticides in line with the EU’s green deal. Industry groups warn that a ban could wipe out over €1 billion of production.

The East African country’s agriculture sector could lose more than Sh150 billion (€1.2 billion) if the ban on the use of agricultural chemicals comes into force, argues the Tegemeo Institute of Research and Policy, based at Egerton University, an agriculture specialist institute in Central Kenya.

“If the ban is effected, then Kenya will have no alternative but to become a net importer of food to meet the needs of its people as a substantial amount of food will be lost,” said Egerton’s Timothy Njagi at an event organised by Science Kenya Africa.

Aligning with EU pesticide rules would help farmers and growers wanting to export to the EU, but could cause problems for subsistence farmers and smallholders who do not.

The lion’s share of Kenya’s exports to the EU is represented by agriculture commodities such as cut flowers, fruits and vegetables, accounting for more than 90% of the total export value.

In recent years, crop production across East Africa has been plagued by locust invasions, prompting heavy use of pesticides.

Up to 90% of Kenyan fresh product output relies on smallholders owning land of between half an acre and five acres in size.

The European Green New Deal, “should be seen as a foreign policy tool for the EU, because it is going to affect every country in the world that the EU trades with”, says Olumide Abimbola, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

That is now evident in Kenya, where the National Assembly is considering whether to impose a total ban on agrochemicals that have been

[SHUTTERSTOCK]
banned in the EU. This move came after Gladys Shollei, a lawmaker in the devolved Uasin Gishu County assembly, tabled a public petition in Parliament arguing that the volume of imported pest control products (PCPs) had more than doubled in four years, posing a risk to health and the environment. The proposed ban would cover around 200 chemicals.

On instructions from the National Assembly’s health committee, the country’s Pest Control Products Board is currently midway through conducting a risk analysis of products sold in Kenya. Of the assessed pesticides, 24 products are carcinogenic, 24 are mutagenic, 35 are endocrine disrupters, and 140 are neurotoxins.

The East African Community, a six-country bloc with its own single market for goods and a common external tariff, also considers whether to harmonise pesticide regulations.

However, environmental campaigners argue that non-toxic products can be used to protect crops.

With African states now focusing more on domestic food security in the wake of production and supply chain disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, countries could prioritise domestic food supply over EU exports.

“Kenyan farmers deserve to know the truth about pesticides. The associations championing the use of pesticides have misled our farmers, who deserve the truth about toxic pesticides”, retorts Greenpeace Africa Food campaigner Claire Nasike.

Others warn that a pesticides ban would reduce production and increase reliance on imports.

“The EGD strategies are likely to erode an already small toolbox for African farmers by between 50 per cent and 60% due to increased farming costs, reduced crop yields, thus a need to increase food production up to 56% by 2050,” contends Stella Simiyu of CropLife Africa.

The impact of the EU’s sustainable goals on African food producers will be a key topic ahead of the sixth meeting between the EU the African Union (AU) next year.

The summit between the African Union (AU) and the EU will be held on 17-18 February 2022 to relaunch the trade partnership between the two neighbouring continents.

“It aims to establish an ambitious future-oriented alliance with Africa which can build an area of prosperity and stability underpinned by a transformational investment package,” the conclusions of the December’s EU summit reads.
The issue of vaccine hoarding and African vaccine production is likely to dominate the long-delayed EU-African Union (AU) summit but both sides want to beef up cooperation on agriculture policy as well.

The much-awaited sixth meeting of the EU’s and AU’s heads of states and governments will take place in Brussels on 17-18 February, two years after the European Commission published its blueprint for a ‘strategic partnership’ with Africa.

The EU is keen to use the ‘partnership’ to encourage African states to adopt the environmental policies in its Green Deal. However, the pandemic has prompted a recalibration of priorities among African countries.

In particular, the major disruption to production and supply chains has pushed many states to focus more on increasing domestic production and reducing their reliance on imported food.

The AU sees the ‘partnership’ process as an opportunity to give its governments and regional blocs more leeway to build up industrial capacity and markets. According to the World Bank, 23% of sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP comes from agriculture.

Contacted by EURACTIV, the European Commission said it is too early at this stage to know about a list of agriculture topics to be discussed at the summit.

In the context of the revamped partnership with Africa, the EU is expected to support concrete actions for the development of intellectual property when it comes to African foodstuffs, for instance.

Last May, the European Commission approved the registration of South Africa’s Rooibos/Red Bush in the bloc’s quality scheme, which became the first African food to receive the status of geographical indication (GIs) in the European Union.
The AU has requested the support of UN food agency FAO to establish a continental strategy for GIs, a call that was picked up by other global institutions including the European Commission, the French Agency for Development (AFD), and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

The strategy for GIs in Africa was finally endorsed in October 2017, receiving the immediate support of the EU, which considers GIs as part of the intellectual property rights protocol of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a flagship AU project which the EU has pledged to support fully.

**AN OWN AFRICAN FOOD POLICY**

The impact of the EU’s flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork strategy (F2F), may spill over into Africa and, more specifically, on small-scale African farmers.

In terms of concrete targets, the Commission proposed an ambitious 50% cut for the use and risk of pesticides, as well as a 50% reduction of highly hazardous pesticides, a 20% cut in fertiliser use and a 50% reduction of antibiotic use in farming and aquaculture, all by 2030 and compared to the EU’s current level.

African farmers fear that requirements to meet those targets, if they want to sell their products to Europe, could fast become a major hurdle to trade, as ramifications of the decisions taken at the EU level do not stop at its borders.

The biggest concern for African farmers is that the EU regulatory framework could become unfair because of the demands being imposed and the requirement to comply with no specific timelines to catch up with European farmers.

Last week, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), a network of 36 civil society actors, representing smallholder farmers and pastoralists, urged the African Union to endorse the initiative to develop an Africa Food Policy aimed at reducing reliance on overpriced imports.

Speaking at the launch of the initiative in Nairobi, AFSA chair Chris Macaloo commented that “production levels in Africa are down, thereby necessitating food imports.”

“The industrialized food production is not resilient to the effects of climate change and it contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, which result in global warming hence reducing productivity,” he said.

Million Belay, AFSA coordinator, added that “most of Africa’s policy space is already occupied by external actors and interests but now with the consultants working at African Union level and other key government non-government institutions, willing to work with the 23 countries, they can now actually write the Policy of Africa based on the wish of the people”.

**UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES**

The EU also wants its recently launched Global Gateway, modelled on China’s Belt and Road investment programme, to be at the heart of what it describes as “innovative financing solutions for the EU-AU partnership, economic recovery and the twin digital and green transitions”.

At last month’s EU-Africa business summit in Marrakech, experts argued that increased private sector investment and policy implementation was needed to drive the growth of African agriculture.

Samira Rafaela, a Dutch Liberal MEP, said the EU’s Farm to Fork strategy, with its green aspirations, was important but stressed that it was equally important that in enforcing its standards, it does not have the unintended consequence of excluding African farm products.

She urged the EU to contribute to the development of farming in Africa, while still respecting local methods that have been honed by generation and shown to work.

“We must ask how we can incorporate some of these methods that work into the mix of agricultural production and international trade,” she said.
Although hailed by part of the European civil society, the EU’s tight line on import tolerances for pesticide substances can cause a lot of headaches for African food producers, who fear being excluded from the single market and left with no alternatives to protect their crops.

Under its flagship food policy, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the EU has committed to taking into account environmental aspects when assessing requests for import tolerances for pesticide substances no longer approved in the bloc, while respecting WTO standards and obligations.

Therefore, the Commission’s priority will be given to environmental issues of global concern that go beyond national boundaries.

As explained by a Commission official, this means in practice that the same EU legislation setting maximum residue levels – including also import tolerances – applies to all food whether domestically produced or imported regardless of the country of origin of the food.

Apart from the environmental grounds, such a move is also intended to meet the request from European food producers, who have asked, in order to remain competitive, that imported products should meet the same environmental standards they have to comply with under the Green Deal.

The new stance on pesticide residues has implications on African farmers who believe the requirement to meet these targets if they want to sell their products to Europe could become a major hurdle to trade.

“The situation is very sensitive and we cannot run away from it,” the CEO of Kenya’s Fresh Produce Consortium, Okisegere Ojepat, told EURACTIV.

As the African continent is largely in the tropical zone, local farmers are quite exposed to plant pests. East Africa last year experienced the worst locust plague in decades, with the
Horn of Africa invaded by swarms of insects that destroyed entire crop harvests.

According to Ojepat, the EU is pushing Africa to implement their own specific targets without offering sufficient alternatives.

"[The EU] is saying 'close that door' without showing our people where the exit door is, while they should be able to offer solutions and alternatives that work equivalent," he complained.

**FIRST STEPS**

The Commission has started the procedure to reduce maximum residue levels (MRLs) for clothianidin and thiamethoxam to the limit of quantification, meaning to technical zero.

The draft proposal was supposed to be presented by the Commission before the end of the year but was ultimately pushed back to the first half of 2022.

Environmental organisations welcomed the Farm to Fork's commitment of the Commission to delete import tolerances, starting with clothianidin and thiamethoxam.

"We now call on member states and the Commission to speed up and act more coherently. This means moving from a one-substance approach that would take decades to an overall zero-tolerance policy of import tolerances for EU banned pesticides," a spokesperson from Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN Europe) told EURACTIV.

According to a Commission source, two groups of substances, in particular, will be identified as global environmental concerns in assessing requests for import tolerances for pesticide substances.

The first is about substances contributing to the worldwide decline of pollinators, as some active substances in the group of neonicotinoids have been assessed as particularly toxic for bees, then contributing significantly to the decline in insect pollination.

According to the Commission, neonicotinoids are not the only factors posing a threat to bees but they are known to contribute significantly to the decline of bee populations worldwide.

The second group concerns substances that are persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic in the environment or very persistent and very bioaccumulating.

**WHAT AFFECTS AFRICA, AFFECTS EUROPE TOO**

For Kenyan farmer Ojepat, applying the EU's environmental standards to African food production could worsen the situation in Africa, as the continent is still struggling to ensure food security.

"The ambitious Green Deal looks a good document for the EU, but not for Africa," he said, adding that the Black Continent accounts for less than 5% of total pesticides used in the world.

But the race for sustainability could end up suffocating the UN's Sustainable developments goals (SDGs) undermining the ability to produce sufficient food, according to Ojepat.

"Europe has gone through a green revolution, so has Asia: they’re both starting from somewhere, while Africa has not even found clearly what needs to be done," he said.

He added that if the Green Deal is going to be implemented as it is, problems of Africa will directly affect Europe because of migration and insecurity aspects.

Although the best solution would be dialogue, he complained that, however, agriculture is not high on the agenda of the sixth EU-African Union summit, which will take place in Brussels on 17-18 February.

"Let's sit and talk. We are trading partners and the best way to engage with partners is to talk and not to be prescriptive," he concluded.
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