



## POLICY AND MARKET CONTEXT

The last few years have been characterised by a strong shift of the policy agenda towards sustainability and resilience. On the one hand, the New Green deal and the Farm to Fork have re-focused the European Union (EU) policy towards sustainability. On the other hand, climate change has brought attention on the agricultural sector's contribution to climate regulation.

In the wider context, world food needs have driven attention to production of agricultural commodities. The Covid outbreak in 2020-2022 and the Ukrainian war in the most recent months of the project have exacerbated the role of sustainability intended as resilience and the need that agriculture and food systems address multiple objectives, including food security. On the other hand, increases in energy and input (in particular fertilisers) prices have further modified the scene, highlighting the need to keep farm income in the agenda.

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has implemented part of these wider policy needs and objectives, in particular through a new green architecture and the new instrument of eco-schemes. In addition, the new approach based on strategic plans promises to support a better coordination among measures.

In this context, the overall goal of the LIFT research project (from May 2018 till April 2022) was to **identify and understand how socio-economic and policy drivers impact on the development of ecological approaches to farming and assess the performance and sustainability of such approaches, taking into account different farming systems at farm, farm-group and territorial scales.** This policy brief presents some of the main policy insights resulting from the LIFT project.

## MAIN IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

### Farm typologies, diversity and uptake of ecological agriculture:

- Different conditions are key to understand the uptake and development of ecological agriculture. Developing better policies for ecological agriculture requires an **improvement of classification, statistics and monitoring ability, accounting for diverse conditions of implementation**; this would have a direct policy relevance in supporting policy design, priority identification and targeting.
- The typology approach emerges as a useful tool to baseline and monitor progress towards a policy goal. Continual monitoring of change through annual surveys, e.g. the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN), would provide a powerful tool for understanding change in these farmers. In this context, **current EU monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be geared to a better consideration of the different agroecological dimensions** constituting the typology.
- It is important for policy design **to take into consideration that spatial clustering** is a prominent feature of ecological farming systems and practices, although perhaps not as universal as commonly presented - especially at the local and regional scales and modulated by crop, system, and geographical context. Agricultural policy should be designed to promote an increase in the rate and clustering of ecological practice adoption to achieve territorial sustainability goals, with the rate of ecological practice adoption to be regarded as a priority over increasing the clustering of adoption.





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- A number of **factors affects uptake of ecological approaches**; the complexity of this decision is even increasing over time and depending more and more on human and strategic factors rather than merely on technical issues. This contributes to increasing differentiation among farms and makes less straightforward the interpretation of different behaviour facing policy.
- Results about the connection between ecological practices and farm-level performance show the persistency of **trade-offs between profitability and environmental sustainability**; this is only partially compensated by higher prices for e.g. organic farming products. This may imply the need of public intervention for promoting these practices and/or more effort towards pushing consumers to ensure willingness to pay for products with higher environmental performance.

## Policy designs on the development of ecological agriculture:

1. In terms of policy measures, **policy should provide larger flexibility under a common EU wide framework** to adjust measures promoting ecological approaches to the regional context and to best support farmers to adapt to new conditions. In other words, LIFT findings support the need for **targeted interventions to encourage and support transition** as a way to manage the heterogeneity within current EU farming. It is also recommended to **consider that environmental performance at the territorial level is context-dependent and ecosystem service demand-dependent**, when identifying which management practices are most favourable to target environmental objectives.
2. There is a need to further improve tailoring of payments to costs. Ecological farming practices likely increase on-farm labour needs and can negatively impact the economic performance of farms. **Higher incentives to maintain economic returns** (such as environmental payments), reflecting regional conditions, might therefore be warranted to stimulate a wider adoption of ecological farming practices.
3. Labour market policies should seek to decrease transaction costs for farmers when hiring/firing farm labour to **allow more flexible adjustments of hired labour**, however without jeopardising the working conditions of hired labour which is often precarious and low-waged.
4. Based on the above, also **innovation is a key area of intervention in order to escape the strong trade-offs between environmental and economic sustainability**; innovation needs to be made more effective through systems approach linking incentives, innovation and education and by further linking innovation measures with sustainability objectives.
5. **A balanced use of a mix of different policy tools is needed**, including collective and result-based payments, as well as value chain contracts; also an appropriate mix of regulation and incentives might be needed for specific areas of intervention.
6. Connection **between policy measures and market strategy** on a regional level is also key for the success of ecological agriculture.



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## Role of different stakeholders and actors in the development of ecological agriculture:

1. **Involvement of different stakeholders and actors is key**, taking into account the current Farm to Fork framing in the consumers and food systems. Hence, **incentives for stakeholders are needed to keep them involved** in research projects and stay active in co-creation.
2. Quality organisational support and advice, along with accessible technologies for farm assessment and communication, in order to **increase the dissemination of information on ecological practice performance among farmers**, should be a priority for cost-effective interventions to improve farm and territorial sustainability performance.
3. Also, **agricultural education** should adjust its curriculum to cover the broad skill set necessary for the implementation of ecological approaches to farming, in order to encourage a successful adoption of ecological technologies, especially to decrease costs of their adoption or even enable increased economic performance. Besides specific skills, also transversal abilities are more and more important for the development of a mindset capable to translate in more effective business models based on ecological agriculture.
4. A **main motivator for perceiving to be constrained lies within the supply chain**. On the other hand, the Farm to Fork Strategy is more explicit in moving towards engaging the supply chain and this may support greater engagement to ensure ecological identities emerge. Market and value chain may indeed have the potential to boost uptake of new technologies. This needs to be further explored in particular concerning its interplay and synergies with policies.

## POLICY AND INFORMATION SUPPORT

- Improvement of the **interconnection between data availability, incentives and governance** may be key for the future of ecological agriculture in the age of digitalisation and a key step in order to facilitate the translation of better information into policy actions.
- The **development of the FADN into the Farm Sustainability Data Network (FSDN)** is an unprecedented opportunity to boost the monitoring and evaluation capacity of the European Commission. Efforts should be put into this process to maximise the added value of this activity. There is now a consolidated body of research on the potential and limitations of the FADN as a tool for assessing the environmental sustainability of EU farms. Consultation of stakeholders during the process is key too.
- The **addition of attitudinal questions to the FADN** would help to provide a robust baseline for understand the different types of farmers and their approach to ecological approaches. Moreover, their inclusion in annual FADN assessments would allow monitoring of progress and change within these types to understand change.



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- Efforts to fill the data gaps can be significantly reduced by **putting together in a common framework information already collected from different sources**: this includes information available in the Integrated Administration and Control System, Land Parcel Identification System and indicators of the Performance and Monitoring Evaluation Framework of the CAP.
- In order to benefit fully from policy monitoring and evaluation to inform future policy design and implementation, it is key to **anticipate data requirements at the early stages of policy design, or implementation**, by ensuring dialogue between researchers and policy makers early in the process.
- Innovation in policy tools may be promoted also through stronger use of **policy experiments and showcasing of successful examples** in Rural Development Programs.

## CONCLUSIONS

In order for agroecology to be impactful it needs to become 'mainstream'. This requires an ecological transition of the whole European farming sector, covering not only farms in specific contexts already open for such change, but also standard farms. The analyses and tools developed in the LIFT project inform policy makers whether ecological farms perform differently and have different trade-offs and synergies than standard farms. While this is an important step, targeted policies, further research and further development of data bases in this direction are needed to realise a broad adoption of agroecology in Europe.

## FURTHER READING

Latruffe, L., Legras, S., Barnes, A., Kantelhardt, J., Krupin, V., Paracchini, M.L., Rega, C., Schaller, L., Toma, L., Tzanopoulos, J., Vranken, L., Zawalińska, K., Bailey, A., Bakucs, Z., Bigot, G., Billaudet, L., Böhm, M., Bormpoudakis, D., Britz, W., Chitea, M., Davidova, S., Desjeux, Y., Duval, J., Duvaleix, S., Hansson, H., Heinrichs, J., Henderson, S., Hostiou, N., Jacquot, A.-L., Jeanneaux, P., Leduc, G., Manevska-Tasevska, G., Matthews, P., Niedermayr, A., Ryan, M., Thompson, B., Tzouramani, I., Van Ruymbek, K., Védrine, L., Veslot, J., Viaggi, D. (2022). **How to improve the adoption, performance and sustainability of ecological farming**. EU research project LIFT (Low-Input Farming and Territories – Integrating knowledge for improving ecosystem based farming), Deliverable 7.6. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.6462474](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6462474).

### Other LIFT open access materials and tools:

Reports and articles: <https://zenodo.org/communities/lift-h2020>

LIFT Typology Tool: <https://agroecology.app.inrae.fr>

LIFT Adoption Tool: [https://sruc-lift.shinyapps.io/adoption\\_tool](https://sruc-lift.shinyapps.io/adoption_tool)

LIFT Massive Online Open Course (MOOC): <https://lms.agreenium.fr/course/index.php?categoryid=56&lang=en>

[www.lift-h2020.eu](http://www.lift-h2020.eu)



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