



The Dairy sector & the Green Deal

December 2019



The Green Deal

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A Green Future for European Dairy

► [Link to our EDA Press Release](#)

The European Green Deal, the flagship initiative that will transform Europe and shape the future of our continent and of our industry, gives us the occasion to highlight the positive role of dairy for society, nutrition, environment and in an economic dimension within the new framework.

We count on the political support in further coordinating efforts in continuous improvement. Many dairy companies – be they small or big – all across our Union are making tremendous efforts to translate the European environmental and climate ambition into dairy reality (see for instance the zero net carbon initiatives, the Dairy Sustainability Framework or our EDA Dairy Product Environmental Footprint project).

The European dairy industry has a long history in providing essential nutrition, caring for animals and shaping the landscape. Dairy is a role model for circularity at production and processing level. We are proud of our contribution to the UN sustainable development goals and have summarised our aims in our ► [Dairy sustainability synopsis](#).

We share and support the European ambitions that are in line with our defined goals and we prepared the environmental methodology for footprinting to achieve the necessary further quantitative improvement in the years to come.

We ask the EU institutions to build a coherent and consistent framework for actions, to alleviate evitable legal burden, protect the functioning of our European Single Market and build a better societal foundation with scientific sound base and encompassing all most relevant indicators for change.

Our pillars remain three qualitative, plus an economic one:

Environment

Dairy is an important actor for climate and the environment. EDA is proud to highlight the relevance of dairy in the wide context of environmental actions – including climate but looking to the broader picture with water and land uses, biodiversity and animal welfare.

Nutrition

The nutritional benefits of dairy are easily highlighted by many examples; especially the EU School food scheme support and the central place in all existing dietary recommendations – all age groups should be eating dairy between 2 and 4 times a day and each can choose what products suit them best. Dairy also allows the huge benefit of converting inedible plant material like grass into highly nutritious products for humans and thus help nourishing the European and world population.

Society

The social role as core actor in rural areas, especially many with geographical challenges is much recognised but not yet enough highlighted. Without dairying many rural areas would bear any economic actor – the animals and the milk processing industry guarantee jobs, education and health infrastructure all across rural Europe.

Economy

In an economic perspective, the baseline of all action and change must be the economic viability. EDA supports profitability and growth for all parts of the chain, and that improvements are made in a manner that allows a smooth transition within the market realities.

Background

Dairy is the most important sector of EU agriculture and present in all EU Member States. Dairy is produced in many different areas across the European Union, with a variety of animals - cows, sheep, goats or buffaloes – and shapes rural Europe. Milk and dairy products bring most relevant nutrition to all ages of the population and regular income to 300.000 employees in the dairy companies, and the connected 700.000 farmers producing the raw milk ▶ [see EDA Economic Report 2020](#). Dairy products are as natural as possible. Their processing methods have been handed down for generations and have been little modified apart of the technical progress in the equipment. However, the dairy industry can also prepare more elaborate specialties, such as a wide range of deserts and other special products for more defined needs, such as for adolescent, elderly and highly active people.

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Main Goals of the Green Deal



Preserving Europe's natural capital

Biodiversity Strategy 2030

The dairy sector plays a vital role at **protecting biodiversity across the EU**, managing the land and allowing biodiversity to prosper.

The sector significantly contributes **in halting and reversing land degradation**. It is also a keystone in **keeping the cultural landscape**.



Early on EDA put biodiversity at the forefront of relevant indications, making it an obligatory part of the **Dairy PEF**, the methodology driven by EDA for assessing the environmental footprint of dairy products considering a broad range of environmental criteria across their full life cycle. No harmonised assessment on biodiversity exists yet, but the Commission work in the PEF should also become the relevant method for the Biodiversity strategy in the Green Deal.

Best practices – Commitments

Practices and commitments to protect biodiversity within the sector include for instance reducing ammonia emissions and nitrate leaching, increasing the amount of protein sourced from local land, sustainable soy sourcing as well as practices aimed at soil management and renewal at farm level (e.g. achieving a positive impact on soil, grassland and nature conservation).



Transition to a circular economy

A new Circular Economy Action Plan

The agricultural and food sector, more specifically the **dairy, is at the origin of circular production cycles**, and the tradition of circular production is the daily experience in the dairy sector.

The sector is continuously working on improving its unique circularity and sustainability. An efficient use of resources is a main pillar of an efficient sector, and we are committed to enhance our vital role in ensuring sustainable production patterns.

We are active in a wide field of topics to improve our circular performance and we work with other sectors on issues such as packaging and recycling, as well as on **by-products valorisation** and **water re-use** – two areas where EDA would ask the EU legislators for opening where legal barriers persist.



With almost one-third of all food produced globally being lost or wasted between the field and the fork, we also seriously **committed to reduce and prevent food waste** along the value chain. Circularity is the core of our dairying since the start and we support further strive to close the circles in the wider world we have today.

Improvements in **water use efficiency** and **recycling measures** have clearly decreased the aquatic impact of dairy. While there is still some way to go, recent developments have shown that the sector is on the right path.

Moreover, further **reducing losses of food** is a continuous challenge that the dairy sector takes very seriously.

In this context, adequate packaging that safeguards the products from external influences plays a key role in avoiding food waste and ensuring safety and quality as a non-negotiable baseline. Nevertheless, the dairy sector is fully committed to reduce packaging waste along the chain and the environmental footprint of packaging is including in the assessment of the Dairy PEF.

Furthermore, the EDA-IFCN study on the protein input to dairy cows via **roughage** shows that the European dairy sector sources the great majority of the protein (70%) from roughage which is almost entirely (95%) grown on farm. This represents a key factor when it comes to environmental and economic sustainability, as well as to circularity and efficient use of resources.

Best practices – Commitments

There are many examples of best practices and targets in dairies for **reducing water consumption**, for instance by improving water efficiency and increasing water reuse.

Actions and initiatives aimed at **reducing food waste** across the dairy supply chain are, for examples, targeted at reducing food waste through improving production efficiency, achieving zero waste for disposal in manufacturing sites, raising awareness at consumer level (e.g. making date labels better understandable), increasing food donation and increasing the use of previously discarded dairy by-products.

With regards to **plastic packaging**, companies are working with suppliers and engage in research to find new more sustainable materials and improve the design of dairy packaging. We can also find many targets in dairies for enhancing reusability, recyclability and composability of packaging.



A zero-pollution Europe

Strategy on the sustainable use of chemicals

The dairy sector uses chemicals in the processing plants, as cleaning agents and disinfectants, that is to **preserve food safety and quality**. Similar uses also exist on farm level, and in transport of raw milk. Since a very long time the industry is used to control any possible residue of these uses along the whole production chain to assure safety of the final products.

The legislation on chemicals used for cleaning needs to remain adequate, to allow for realistic and reasonable use and storage of cleaning agents.

An improvement of the legislation of chemicals and residues would be highly appreciated for the agri-food sector where legal incongruity exists (e.g. between pesticides and biocides residues).

Clean Air and Water Action Plans

Water is a very important factor for dairy; it is the main part of milk and it is essential in dairy processing in order to secure food safety via cleaning/rinsing. Water use and quality is part of the main indicators of the Dairy PEF methodology, assessing the overall environmental footprint of dairy products.

In order to reduce the impact on water basins, significant efforts have been put to improve the quality of the water discharged from dairy installations.

The **quality of air** on farm and in production plants is also important contributions for assessing the overall environmental footprint of dairy products.



Best practices – Commitments

Best practices in the dairy sector include, for instance, company-level commitments for enhancing the chemical status of wastewaters and national programmes aimed at improving water quality levels at rivers and lakes.

Strategies of the Green Deal



Farm to Fork

Farm to Fork Strategy

The encompassing Farm to Fork strategy of the Commission is most welcome from the dairy industry. Already in 2015, our EDA president called for establishing a 'Food Commissioner' and according policy, to allow for an integrated and fully aligned approach on all parts of the agri-food sector's work and framework.

Our commitment is to contribute to the achievement of a **European sustainable food system**, across the three qualitative pillars of sustainability, plus the economic one – that is social, nutrition, environment and economic (*see Introduction and ► [Dairy sustainability synopsis](#)*). Therefore, we are committed to **reduce our environmental footprint** while continuing to provide nutritious, safe, and affordable products to the European and world citizens.

The **Dairy PEF (product environmental footprint)** is a fundamental tool for driving environmentally sustainable practices in the dairy sector and allowing to quantify the improvements. The project, conducted by EDA from 2014 to 2018 and officially approved by the EU Commission, members states and NGOs as the reference methodology in dairy, covers a broad list of environmental indicators and represents the holistic and proactive approach taken by the sector in the field of environmental assessment.

Jointly with other measures – e.g. nutritional content and consumer information - it is a helpful tool to describe all benefits of food and the effort of producing high quality food.

It is currently the best way to provide information on environmental indicators in a credible and measurable way, while being always further refined to integrate more indicators. It would be useful to make it the baseline for any relevant green claim in the EU, for communication to citizens and consumers.

Any action decided would need to be science based, allow possible quantifiable results and coherent in the wider context of the complexity of food and drink production, to assure full credibility and real long-term solutions.

For a successful conversion of the system, the focus on main hotspots, genuine triggers and feasibility will allow the right stepwise approach, improving all indicators with time.



Best practices – Commitments

A broad variety of indicators exist to accomplish **sustainable food systems**, and dairy companies are focusing on major items in their remit, while assuring to also improve all other ones and avoiding any negative trade-offs on their path. For specific targets within the dairy sector on biodiversity protection, water and energy efficiency, food waste, packaging and GHG emissions reduction, *please see the specific chapters of this paper*.

Many dairy companies have committed to eliminate **deforestation** in the supply chains. They include, for instance, targets on deforestation-free dairy value chains or covering all soy supply on responsibly sourced basis.

Among companies, there are also commitments for scaling up **regenerative agriculture** practices to protect soil health, enhance carbon sequestration, enhance the nutrient density of food while decreasing the reliance on synthetic inputs, as well as increasing the number of ingredients sourced from local production, in order to achieve a net positive impact on biodiversity and ecosystems.

Dairy companies provide a **variety of dairy products** for all ages and needs, for different taste and consumer preferences. Several companies and some national targets exist to reduce certain nutrients in certain categories, while others assure the know-how of regional qualities and most traditional recipes.



A modernised and simplified CAP

CAP reform proposal

The journey of the “European Green Deal” will absorb a lot of our energy in the coming years. The transformation of Europe to a carbon neutral continent, whilst also improving other environmental indicators, will ask an incredible effort from agriculture and dairy. We want to focus on this challenge.

On this journey, we will need the full support of the Common Agricultural Policy – “full support” translates in both, financial and political support (reference: EDA president at *EDA2019.eu* conference).

EDA’s recommendations for the future CAP are designed to address the needs of all three pillars of sustainability; the economic, social and environmental dimension. The proposed new set up of the CAP with its nine specific goals (including climate action, sustainable resource management and biodiversity) and its new delivery model based on national strategic plans is perfectly fit for uncorking the potential of the ‘green architecture’ of the CAP at production level.

This environmental ambition of the new CAP must also translate into a reinforcement of the chapters on sustainable development in trade agreements negotiated and concluded by the Union with third countries.



Transforming agriculture and rural areas

Vision for inclusive Rural Areas

With about 700,000 dairy farmers cooperating on a daily basis with their milk processors across Europe and more than 12,000 processing sites, mostly in the less densely industrialised areas, employing more than 300,000 Europeans, **the dairy sector is the economic backbone of the rural areas in Europe.**

Dairy provides **employment and livelihoods** to many people and contributes to Europe's (and wider) economic success. Dairy helps ensuring an inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning.

Despite the current urban growth, the sector contributes to the maintenance of safe, resilient and sustainable rural areas.

Furthermore, dairy contributes significantly to the **development of the youngest** in societies.

Dairy farms have also an important role creating and maintaining a unique **countryside scenery** with a rich variety of **landscapes and habitats** that make rural areas attractive for the establishment of enterprises, places to live, and tourist and recreation businesses. Dairy animals are the principal contributors: they provide environmental, economic and patrimonial advantages to rural areas.



Achieving climate neutrality

Revising 2030 climate targets

EDA is proud to highlight the **relevance of dairy in the wide context of environmental actions** – including climate, but also looking to the broader picture with water and land uses, biodiversity and animal welfare.

It is important to make climate action happen, but we should not forget that the dairy industry is looking at the **overall environmental assessment** from a more general point of view – to assure we do not improve on climate indicators while at the same time negatively impacting on other environmental components, e.g. water or land use. To do so, the dairy sector has developed the Dairy PEF (product environmental footprinting methodology), harmonising carbon/ climate assessment as well as 15 other environmental indicators.

The European dairy sector has significantly reduced its **greenhouse gas emissions** in the past decades. The carbon footprint per produced unit of milk in Europe is already among the lowest in the world and the sector is fully committed to further decrease its carbon intensity and contribute to the achievement of the EU GHG emissions goals.

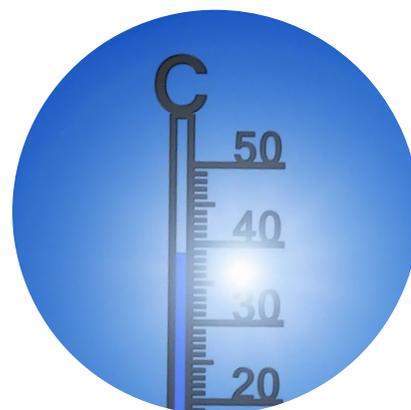
We are committed to contribute to achieving the 2030 revised emission goals and we hope that the effort will be adequately shared amongst sectors and put in relation to services provided.

Best practices – Commitments

Many dairy companies have emissions reduction targets for 2030 or earlier covering emissions from dairy processing and from the upstream and downstream phases of the dairy chain.

Extending ETS

The Dairy industry has made an important effort to seek relevant information about its ETS status and the carbon leakage risk to its powdered products. As long as the rest of the world does not endorse an own ETS systems, we need to maintain a carbon leakage status. Carbon leakage would mean a worsening of the global environmental condition, especially in view of the fact that the carbon footprint of European dairy is the lowest in the world.



Climate Pact

The dairy sector is ready to contribute to achieving the climate goals and hope the effort will be adequately shared amongst sectors, and put in relation to services provided (not forgetting the Paris agreement mention that food and nutrition security are of utmost importance and need special consideration)

The detailed requirements will be part of the 2030 climate targets (see above) and their probable 2050 extension; some dairy companies already have 2050 strategies at hand, and others will follow these innovation and investment needed.

The EU's implementation of the Paris Agreement must also be done in a balanced way that allows for production of highly nutritious dairy products in Europe, where the carbon footprint per produced unit of milk is among the lowest in the world.

Climate Law

The European dairy sector plays a key role in making the food system more sustainable and is **willing to further engage in order to reduce its environmental impact**. In this context, EDA welcomes the EU Commission strategy aimed at achieving EU carbon-neutrality by 2050 and **acknowledges its responsibility** to contribute to the transition towards an

environmentally sustainable and climate-neutral Europe, while continuing to provide healthy and affordable nutrition for all.

The Dairy Product Environmental Footprint (**Dairy PEF**) has shown our **proactive approach** in increasing the sustainability of the food system and represents an essential tool for further decreasing the environmental impact of dairy operations, including the carbon footprint.

Best practices – Commitments

European dairies are frontrunners at global level when it comes to climate action. Many dairy industries have already signed up for the commitment of carbon neutral dairy chain by 2050 or even 2035, and we can already find examples of carbon-neutral certified companies in 2019.

Carbon border tax

EDA will be happy to see a carbon border tax assuring that the efforts of the EU producers are kept safe from unfair imports, and that will allow us to further improve our climate impact. We need to ensure that the European dairy remains competitive on the internal and external market across our journey towards carbon neutrality.



Clean, reliable and affordable energy

Review Energy Legislation

European Framework for gas - Review Energy Taxation directive

Energy is important for the dairy sector, across all stages of production and processing. We also aim to be a net contributor to clean energy, via the production of biogas, energy from biomass, the reuse of heat and the production of renewable energy onsite using PV panels and wind turbines.

We believe it is important to support further efforts in the field of energy production and consumption to be fully credible in our overall sustainability approach.

Best practices – Commitments

Many companies in dairy have committed to completely rely on renewable energy sources for electricity use in dairy operations. There are also targets for increasing the use of renewable energy in dairy farms.



Sustainable transport

Transport is an important factor of dairy chain, as companies are the ones collecting the raw milk from the farms all over the countryside.

With regards to environmental impact, this is only minor for most dairy products (see Dairy PEF). Still, the dairy companies are willing to further engage in improving this part as well, with the right support.

Best practices – Commitments

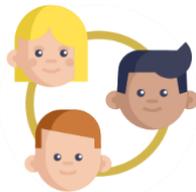
Commitments on reducing the environmental impact of transport in the dairy sector include the reduction of fuel consumption in the collection of raw milk.

Foundations of the Green Deal



Financing the transition

EDA would be in favour of general measures to support more sustainable investment, green financing etc., to assure full credibility of our sustainability efforts in the dairy sector; details would need to be assessed.



Leave no one behind (Just Transition)

Affordability of food and valuable nutrition for all is a main aim of the dairy sector, and we wish to continue contributing to simple, affordable and nutritious food for all in the future as well, especially for the weak parts of the population. Dairy products, as well as eggs, are already the most affordable sources of high value animal protein.

Dairy products are considered nutrient-rich foods, which means they provide many essential nutrients, but relatively few calories and at the same time at affordable prices. Milk, yoghurts and cheeses are all excellent sources of high-quality protein, as well as calcium, phosphorus, potassium, iodine, vitamin B2 and B12. Contrary to nutrient-poor foods ('empty calories'), nutrient-rich foods such as dairy are vital for a balanced and healthy diet ► [more information in our EDA Factsheet](#).

EDA relevant documents

- EDA Sustainability Statement on the European Dairy Sector & the SDGs [Click here](#)
- EDA Dairy Sustainability Synopsis [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet on Feeding the World with Dairy [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet on the Dairy PEF Project [Click here](#)
- EDA Dairy Factsheet on Dairy contribution to social sustainability [Click here](#)
- EDA Sustainability Factsheet: Dairy important actor for climate and the environment [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: Preventing food wastage in the dairy sector [Click here](#)
- EDA position on the reduction of certain plastic products on the environment [Click here](#)
- EDA Sustainability Statement on circular economy [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: what can you produce with raw milk? [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: (Re)using water in the dairy sector [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: Water as a key resource in the dairy sector [Click here](#)
- EDA guidelines for interpretation of the Single Use Plastics Directive [Click here](#)
- EDA Statement: EU Protein Strategy and the dairy sector [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: "Health benefits and nutritional value of dairy" [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: "Nutrient-rich dairy, an affordable source of nutrition" [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: "Dairy: A source of high-quality protein" [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: "Why dairy is so important for achieving a healthy sustainable diet" [Click here](#)
- EDA position on potential policy applications of the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) methodology [Click here](#)
- EDA position on EU Product Policy and potential applications of the Environmental Footprint methods [Click here](#)
- EDA Sectorial guidelines for voluntary origin labelling [Click here](#)
- EDA position on the EU Organic Regulation revision proposal [Click here](#)
- EDA Factsheet: "The European dairy industry fully endorses and supports animal welfare" [Click here](#)
- EDA paper on EU-Africa cooperation [Click here](#)
- EDA Dairy Sustainability Synopsis [Click here](#)
- EDA Position Paper on LULUCF proposals for the EU 2030 climate framework [Click Here](#)
- EDA position on current env challenges, including EU carbon neutrality by 2050 [Click here](#)

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connect to the world of dairy