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The latest EU agriculture, environment & trade news

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COMMISSION LAUNCHES AI PLATFORM TO TRACK FOOD FRAUD, CONTAMINATION, DISEASE

The Commission has launched an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based platform designed to speed up the detection of food fraud, contaminated products & foodborne disease outbreaks. The new tool will help Member State authorities analyse supply-chain data & coordinate responses to food safety risks.

Announced on March 10, the platform, called TraceMap, uses AI to analyse data from existing EU food safety systems & identify links between operators, consignments & supply chains. The Commission (DG SANTE) said the system will help authorities detect suspicious activity more quickly & carry out targeted investigations, while strengthening controls on imports. DG SANTE officials said the platform will "accelerate the detection of food fraud, contaminated food & foodborne disease outbreaks across the EU," & "reinforce consumer safety & help national authorities work more effectively, by innovating on how we assess, detect & respond to food safety risks & fraudulent activity."

TraceMap is designed to streamline food safety risk assessments by analysing large volumes of data & rapidly identifying links between operators & consignments. Once a risk is detected, the platform can monitor the agri-food supply chain to help authorities recall unsafe or fraudulent products more quickly. The tool is now available to national authorities in all Member States. According to officials, it will enable them to better target controls & conduct more detailed investigations without requiring additional resources. By analysing existing EU data systems, the platform can track trade patterns & production flows & help investigators identify suspicious operators. The system integrates information from EU food safety databases including the Rapid Alert System for Food & Feed (RASFF) & the Trade Control & Expert System (TRACES). A pilot version of TraceMap was recently used to help identify & recall infant milk formula produced with contaminated ARA oil from China.

Commenting this week, Health & Animal Welfare Commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, explained that "TraceMap is a breakthrough that will revolutionise the EU's capacity to react to food safety crises & to clamp down on food fraud." "It will allow faster detection of food fraud & of those trying to circumvent our import conditions," the Hungarian politician added. "It will provide better coordination between Member States & stronger protection of both EU farmers & consumers." "This is critical infrastructure for crisis prevention & control & should help boost all stakeholders' confidence in our robust food safety systems," he concluded.

https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/acn/tracemap_en

SEVEN ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE PROJECTS BACKED WITH €103 MILLION

The EU's executive has announced more than €103 million in funding for seven strategic environment & climate projects across the EU under the LIFE Programme*, aimed at strengthening climate resilience, restoring ecosystems & supporting the transition to a circular economy, on March 9. The projects, located in FI, FR, EL, NL, PT, SK & ES, are designed to accelerate the implementation of EU environmental & climate policies while improving public health, economic stability & the resilience of food systems & ecosystems.

According to the Commission, the selected initiatives will focus on areas including climate & water resilience, nature restoration, sustainable land use & circular economy measures, & are expected to mobilise additional public & private investment at national level. The largest share of EU funding will go to the LIFE HumedalES project in Spain, which will receive €29.7m to restore around 26,200 hectares of wetlands across 107 Natura 2000 sites, with the aim of improving flood protection, water security & biodiversity.

In Finland, the ACWA LIFE project will receive €16.5m to restore & protect water systems including streams, lakes, coastal waters & groundwater. France's LIFE ADAPT EST project will receive €15.6m to strengthen climate resilience in the Grand Est region through improved climate expertise, water governance & infrastructure capable of withstanding extreme weather events. Portugal's LIFE IP AGRILOOP project will receive €15.8m to develop circular solutions across agroforestry, agri-food & tourism sectors in the Azores. Slovakia's NatAdaptSK project will receive €10.1m to deploy nature-based solutions addressing climate risks affecting agriculture, forests & biodiversity.

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In Greece, the LIFE SIP GR Blue project will receive €8.9m to restore marine ecosystems & tackle pollution, marine litter & underwater noise. Meanwhile, the CEL4LIFE project in the Netherlands will receive €6.9m to support Limburg's transition to a circular economy, with the aim of halving raw material use in sectors such as chemicals, manufacturing & construction by 2030. The funding forms part of the EU's LIFE programme, which is dedicated to environmental, climate & clean energy objectives & has supported more than 6,500 projects since its launch in 1992. The programme has a budget of €5.43 billion for the 2021-2027 period. Climate Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra said the investments were essential to accelerate the clean transition. "The cost of inaction keeps rising. Investing in climate is not optional, it is essential for our economy, our security & our independence," the Dutch politician said. "The business case for accelerating the clean transition is clear & these Strategic LIFE projects are investments that adds on towards our climate goals." For her part, Jessika Roswall, Environment Commissioner, said the projects would strengthen Europe's natural foundations. "Long-term strategic LIFE projects are essential to deliver a secure & sustainable Europe," the Swede stressed "Today's investment strengthens Europe's natural infrastructure - the foundation of our economic security, competitiveness & resilience."
https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en

WOMEN IN FARMING PLATFORM LAUNCHED ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The EU's executive has launched a new 'Women in Farming Platform'* aimed at strengthening the role of women in agriculture & improving equal opportunities in rural areas across the EU. Unveiled to coincide with International Women's Day, on March 8, the initiative was first announced in the Vision for Agriculture & Food & is intended to increase the number of women involved in farming businesses while encouraging cooperation & the exchange of experience across Member States. DG AGRI said the platform was "a new initiative designed to empower women in farming & strengthen equal opportunities in this sector & rural communities." According to the Commission, only 32% of farms in the Union are managed by women & just 3% are run by women under the age of 40, with officials noting that women are often "driving innovation, sustainability, & diversification in rural economies, yet they remain under-represented."

The new platform will support mentoring schemes, including cross-border mentoring, & promote networking among women farmers while highlighting successful projects & role models. It will also aim to feed practical experience from the field into EU & national policymaking. By promoting successful examples, officials underline that the initiative will help challenge long-standing perceptions in the sector, noting that "agriculture has long been seen as male-dominated." The forum is also intended to strengthen rural communities & support generational renewal in farming. Under the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Member States can introduce targeted measures, including enhanced financial support, to promote women's participation in the rural economy. The Commission added that improved gender-disaggregated data will support policymaking, noting that in 2024 alone 55,300 young women received support to set up farming businesses & benefit from additional income support. Also on Sunday, DG AGRI launched a 'Call for interest', via a button at the weblink below, inviting "all individuals residing in the EU & working in agriculture or in an agriculture-related field to express their interest."
https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/women-farmers_en

FAO STATS SHOW FIRST PRICE RISE IN FIVE MONTHS, CEREALS, MEAT, VEGOILS LEAD

World food commodity prices in Feb were 0.9% up on their Jan level, the first overall rise in five months, with higher cereal, meat & vegetable oil prices more than offsetting falls for dairy & sugar. The latest numbers from the FAO show that prices are 1.0% below their level of a year ago & 21.8% below the March 2022 peak.

In its Food Price Index* for Feb, published on March 6, the UN body put the month-on-month rise for vegetable oils at 3.3%, reaching the highest level since June 2022. "The increase was driven by higher prices of palm, soy & rapeseed oils, more than offsetting lower sunflower oil quotations," the organisation's experts said. "International palm oil prices rose for the third consecutive month, underpinned by firm global import demand & seasonally lower outputs in Southeast Asia." They put rising soyoil prices down to "expectations of supportive biofuel policy measures in the US, while rapeseed oil prices rebounded amid prospects for stronger import demand for Canadian supplies," & added that "sunflower oil prices eased moderately, reflecting subdued import demand due to elevated prices & rising export supplies from Argentina, but they remained well above their year-earlier levels."

Cereals were up 1.1% from Jan but still 3.5% below their Feb 2025 level. For wheat, the month-on-month rise was 1.8% "underpinned by reports of frosts & heightened winterkill risks in parts of Europe & the USA." "Logistical disruptions in the Russian Federation & continuing tensions in the Black Sea region also contributed to the increase," they added. A rise in coarse grain prices was more moderate, with maize "broadly steady, while barley quotations continued to firm on sustained demand from China for Australian supplies & purchases by North African buyers sourcing from Europe," they said, noting that "prices of sorghum also increased on strong international demand." Rice prices were up by 0.4% in Feb "supported by sustained demand for basmati & Japonica varieties," they added.

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For meat, prices were up 0.8% from its Jan level & 8.0% above a year earlier. “The increase was largely driven by higher world bovine & ovine meat prices, while poultry & pigmeat quotations registered only marginal upticks,” representatives at the Rome-based agency explained. “Ovine meat prices climbed to a new record high, underpinned by limited exportable supplies from Oceania, the main source of global exports, amid steady global demand.” Prices for beef were up, “supported by robust buying interest from China & the US, which sustained export prices in leading suppliers, notably Australia & Brazil,” & “pigmeat prices edged up slightly,” with higher US quotations “reflecting firm international demand…, partially offset by lower export prices in Brazil due to ample supplies.” In the EU, “prices stabilised as earlier holiday-related slaughter backlogs that contributed to a sharp decline in the previous month were largely cleared,” they said. They put a marginal rise in poultry meat prices down to firm import demand in several markets partly counterbalanced by ample supplies in key producing countries, limiting upward price pressure.

Dairy prices were down 1.2% from Jan & 19.2% below a year earlier. “The February decline extends the downward trend that began in July 2025,” the FAO authors said. “The easing was mainly driven by a continued decline in cheese prices, particularly in the EU, driven by improved milk availability, softer demand from key export markets, & intensified international competition.” Quotations for both skim milk powder & whole milk powder increased. The FAO said the rise was “supported by a pick-up in import demand, particularly from North Africa, the Near East & Southeast Asia, alongside a seasonal slowdown in milk supply growth in New Zealand.” Butter prices also rose, registering their first monthly increase since reaching an all-time high in June 2025. The organisation said the hike was “underpinned by firmer international demand & tightening supply growth prospects in Oceania,” although gains were limited because “the increases were capped by softer quotations in the European Union amid ample cream availability.”

Sugar prices fell sharply: The FAO Sugar Price Index averaged 4.1% lower than in Jan & was 27.3% below its level a year earlier, marking the second consecutive monthly decline & the lowest reading since October 2020. “Expectations of ample global supplies in the current season continued to exert downward pressure on world sugar prices,” the organisation said. It added that “overall favourable production prospects, including forecasts of a record output in the US, more than offset upward price pressure stemming from the downward revision to India’s production forecast & the seasonal decline in output in Brazil.”

https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/

IN BRIEF: Özdemir becomes state President; NL BBB MEPs move to ECR political group;

Özdemir becomes state President: Cem Özdemir, Germany’s Federal Agriculture Minister from 2021-2025, won an election to become Minister-President of Baden Württemberg on March 8, beating both the centre-right CDU party & the far-right AfD party.

The Green party politician was born in Urach in Baden Württemberg in 1965, of parents who had moved there from Turkey. The Guardian newspaper reported on its website on March 9 that the vegetarian cyclist had secured 30.2% of the vote in the Southwestern German state, narrowly defeating the Christian Democrats (CDU). The result came after the CDU had previously held a double-digit lead in polling in the region, a major centre of the country’s car industry & home to many of the world’s leading automotive companies such as Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, & Bosch. The newspaper said the outcome dealt a setback to the CDU leadership, while Chancellor Friedrich Merz described it as a “bitter result.”

According to The Guardian, which described him as “charismatic,” Özdemir ran what it described as a pragmatic & centrist campaign for the Greens, who currently poll far lower at the national level. The win means that Özdemir will become Germany’s first State Premier from the country’s significant Turkish diaspora community. In a message on the social media network X, the new Minister-President said that “Baden-Württemberg has always been strongest when we have worked together across party lines, in the interest of the state.” “That is exactly what I want to do as Minister-President: keep the state together in the centre & ensure that decisions are not made at the extreme edges, but where people seek compromises together,” he stressed.

NL BBB MEPs move to ECR group: Two Dutch members of the European Parliament from the Farmer–Citizen Movement (BBB) have left the European People’s Party (EPP) group & joined the European Conservatives & Reformists (ECR) group, it emerged this week. In a statement issued on March 10, the ECR group said it had welcomed Sander Smit & Jessika van Leeuwen as new members after BBB decided to leave the largest political group in the EP. The two MEPs were “formally admitted at a meeting of the Group,” it said. Nicola Procaccini, Co-Chairman of the ECR, said in the release: “We are delighted to welcome Sander Smit & Jessika van Leeuwen to the ECR family. Their arrival further strengthens our Group as the natural home for centre-right forces committed to reforming the European Union with common sense & pragmatism.”

He added that the group “continues to play a constructive role in the European Parliament, working to build broad majorities around practical solutions & a Europe that focuses on the big challenges while doing less, but doing it better.” Patryk Jaki, the group’s other Co-Chairman, said the Dutch party’s priorities were closely aligned with those of ECR. “BBB’s strong commitment to farmers, rural communities & national decision-making reflects priorities that are central to our political family,” he said in the release.

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The decision to leave the EPP group was also explained by BBB figures in the same statement. Henk Vermeer, leader of the party's parliamentary group in the Dutch Tweede Kamer, said that "following a thorough analysis within our party & among our supporters, BBB has concluded in recent months that the ECR Group offers the best foundation for implementing our programme." He added that the move followed the party's political line of "less Brussels, more room for farmers, fishermen, regions, & national sovereignty."

Separately, Sander Smit informed (former) colleagues of the change in a note circulated to them. In the message, he wrote that the party leadership & board had decided "to join the ECR Party & ECR Group," adding that this meant "our membership of the EPP Group also comes to an end & our seats will transfer to the ECR Group." Smit thanked his ex-colleagues in the EPP group for their cooperation since the 2024 European elections, saying he wrote "with a heart full of gratitude for the trust placed in us, the warm welcome, the pleasant cooperation, & the political opportunities within the EPP group since June 2024." He added that the two BBB MEPs would continue to work for centre-right cooperation in the EP, saying they would seek "through broad centre-right & socially conservative cooperation - to work towards the future of the European Union." With the addition of the two Dutch MEPs, the ECR group said its membership in the EP now stands at 81.

DATES FOR DIARY: Dialogue on farm statistics; EBAF; Carbon farming summit; Organics;

Dialogue on farm statistics: The Commission will host a high-level 'implementation dialogue' on agricultural farm statistics in Brussels on March 24, bringing together officials, farmers' representatives, agri businesses, national statistical authorities & data users to discuss how EU farm data collection could be simplified. The meeting will take place from 10:30 to 13:00 CET in the Berlaymont building & will be chaired by Commissioner for Economy & Productivity, Implementation & Simplification, Valdis Dombrovskis.

The discussions will focus on lessons from the current EU system for collecting farm statistics & possible ways to reduce the administrative burden linked to reporting requirements. The first session of the dialogue will concentrate on stakeholder feedback regarding the Regulation on integrated farm statistics (2018/1091), which underpins the EU's agricultural census conducted in 2020 & sample farm data collections carried out in 2023 & scheduled again for 2026. Participants will be invited to identify aspects of the current framework that have proven particularly burdensome when reporting agricultural data. They will also be asked whether there are overlaps between statistical data collection & other EU administrative requirements, & whether information already gathered from farmers for other purposes could be reused for statistical reporting.

The session will open with a presentation by EUROSTAT Director-General Mariana Kotzeva outlining the main features of the Regulation & its reporting obligations, followed by an exchange of views with participants. A second session will examine the future of EU farm statistics under the heading 'Agricultural farm statistics in the future: simplified & relevant.' Discussions are expected to explore how reporting requirements could be facilitated or simplified, including through greater use of digital tools, while ensuring that the data collected remain relevant for the agricultural sector & policymakers. The event will begin with introductory remarks from Dombrovskis before the two sessions, while the Latvian politician will also deliver concluding remarks at the end of the meeting. ***Click here** for further details;*

EBAF plenary (March 23-24): This latest 'implementation dialogue', which are coming round thick & fast these days, is taking place at around the same time as the next plenary session of the European Board for Agriculture & Food (EBAF) - set for March 23 in the afternoon. The more technical follow-up part is slated for the following day (March 24), in the morning. The exact starting timing etc. will be communicated to members in the coming days. As already flagged in this publication & as agreed in the Work Programme 2026, the next EBAF will be dedicated to the 'Vision for Agriculture & Food' adopted on Feb 19, 2025. Incidentally, the last gathering of the forum, originally slated for Feb 19-20, was actually cancelled. At the time, there was talk that it was due to a clash in Hansen's agenda. But it should be borne in mind that there were plans in train for Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen to address EBAF members on the first anniversary of the 'Vision'. It is still unclear if VdL will make an appearance at the March meeting, either in person or via video message.

Padua to host EU carbon farming summit: Padua will host a major European conference on carbon farming next week, bringing together policymakers, farmers, researchers & industry representatives to discuss agriculture's role in tackling climate change. The European Carbon Farming Summit will take place from March 17-19, at the Padova Congress Centre in Padua, Italy. Organisers say the event is expected to gather more than 700 participants from across Europe, including farmers, scientists, companies & public authorities. Now in its third edition, the summit will be held in Italy for the first time after previous editions in Spain & Ireland. Discussions will focus on carbon farming, a set of agricultural & forestry practices designed to increase the absorption & storage of carbon dioxide in soils & crops, while also improving soil fertility & strengthening farm resilience to climate change. The 2026 edition is organised by SAE Innova & Climate KIC as part of the Project Credible consortium, & is co-hosted by EIT Food / EIT Food South, which coordinates the LILAS4SOILS initiative, together with Confagricoltura Veneto, with support from Veneto Agricoltura. The opening session on March 17 (09:00-11:00) in the Giotto Hall is expected to feature a high-level discussion on EU climate policies & the development of sustainable agriculture. Among the scheduled speakers are Kurt Vandenberghe, Director-General for Climate Action, Elisabeth Werner, Director-General for Agriculture &

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Rural Development; Massimiliano Giansanti, President of Confagricoltura & COPA; & Rémi Rocca, Global Vice-President for Sustainability at Royal Canin. Organisers say the event will also highlight experiences from farms in the Veneto region, with local farmers & agricultural businesses presenting examples of innovative practices already being implemented in the area. ***https://www.carbonfarmingsummit.eu/**;*

Organic revision timetable: The EP's Agriculture Committee has set out a timetable for the revision of the EU Organic Regulation that would see the file reach plenary in Sept. The process formally started on March 5 with an exchange of views in COMAGRI *[see AF25-26]*, during which the Commission - in the person of DG AGRI boss Elisabeth Werner - presented its proposal to MEPs. Committee Chair Veronika Vrecionová (ECR, CZ) is expected to announce the procedures for handling the dossier on March 18. MEPs will then have until March 25 at 13:00 to table amendments to the proposal. According to the schedule now widely circulating, translations of the amendments should be available by April 14, ahead of the Committee's consideration of the amendments on May 4. In parallel, political discussions among the Parliament's negotiating team will continue through exchanges between the Rapporteur & Shadows, scheduled for March 17, May 21 & June 23. A series of technical meetings is also planned on April 13 & 20, May 7 & 11, and June 1, 5 & 9. The Agriculture Committee is currently expected to vote on the report on July 14, with the final vote in the Parliament's plenary session scheduled for Sept, with trilogues to get underway straight away (under the Irish Presidency). The Parliament's lead negotiator on the file is Camilla Laureti (S&D, IT). The Shadow Rapporteurs are Marta Wcisło (EPP, PL), Valérie Deloge (PfE, FR), Ciaran Mullooly (Renew, IE), Martin Häusling (Greens/EFA, DE), Arash Saeidi (The Left, FR) & Stanislav Stoyanov (ESN, BG).

European Organic Congress heads to Cork: The European Organic Congress, organised by ***IFOAM Organics Europe*** & Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, is set to take place in the charming city of Cork in early Oct. *Ireland's Minister Martin Heydon is expected to attend, while it is still unclear if Commissioner Christophe Hansen or his trusted Director-General will travel Leeside & if the highly-anticipated updated EU Organic Action Plan will be published by then (expected sometime between Sept-Dec).* Ahead of the Congress, IFOAM Organics has pencilled in ***"two exclusive gatherings"*** for June. The first one (public) is a preview of the European Organic Congress at the European Economic & Social Committee (EESC) on June 23, where policymakers & members of the movement will meet to discuss the future of the sector within the evolving budgetary & regulatory framework, while the second one (members only) is the IFOAM Organics Europe General Assembly - online & in person in Brussels (June 24) - where the organisation will elect a new President. Incidentally, the two events will take place just after the last AGRIFISH Council under the Cypriot Presidency - slated for June 22 in Luxembourg.

In preparation for the incoming Irish Presidency (from July 1), Werner will travel to Dublin next week (March 20) for a meeting with Department officials, where the revision of organic rules, the future CAP & MFF for the period 2028-2034 will be up for debate. Incidentally these topics were also thrashed out at BIOFACH, the largest organic trade fair in Europe, that took place in Nuremberg last month (Feb 10-13). *Hansen was originally scheduled to travel to the Southern German city, but he remained on in Brussels, to accompany his colleague Maroš Šefčovič, during bilateral talks with Australian Trade Minister Don Farrell.* During her address at BIOFACH, Werner, who is currently double jobbing as DG AGRI's Deputy Director-General - possibly until the Department is overhauled to better reflect the 'new' broader policy & regulatory framework - reiterated the Commission's commitment to support the development of the organic sector. *Speaking of DDGs, it would be very surprising if Spain's Diego Canga Fano, who turned 61 on Christmas Day, did not get the nod to take up the post vacated by Michael Niejahr. Currently 'Acting', it is only a matter of time before the well-connected & politically astute senior DG AGRI official, who previously served as Chef de Cabinet for EP President Antonio Tajani (EPP, IT), is formally appointed, sources indicate.* In a press release by IFOAM Organics Europe, published on Feb 11, Werner is quoted as saying that "organic farming is & will remain a flagship pillar of the CAP," as "it contributes to competitiveness, to sustainability, & to resilience of European agriculture." And interestingly, as some observers pointed out, she evoked the (now defunct) Farm to Fork Strategy, underlining that "our objective is to have 25% organic farmland by 2030," which, even with the best will in the world, remains unrealistic at this stage. Speaking at BIOFACH, under this year's theme *'Growing tomorrow: Young voices, bold visions',* Jan Plagge, (outgoing) President of IFOAM Organics Europe, said that the Commission's "regulatory roadmap & its targeted revision of the Organic Regulation tabled in Dec, together with its commitment to work towards an updated Organic Action Plan, confirm the strategic importance of organic production for Europe's agri-food future. These initiatives provide much-needed continuity & direction for the organic sector in a changing policy context".

Agra Facts correction: *In the last edition, we referred to the figure of 11% of EU agricultural land that is now farmed organically. But we mistakenly wrote that this represented "around 70 million hectares". This should have read* ***"17 million hectares."*** *As mentioned above, Werner referenced the broader objective of reaching a 25% target of agricultural land under organics by 2030 at BIOFACH last month. Keep in mind, during discussions leading up to the Farm to Fork Strategy, DG ENV was reportedly pushing for a 30% target, while the organic movement itself thought 20% was more realistic. Either way, the figure of "70 million hectares" - though some may say is aspirational - was wide off the mark, as we misheard Werner's remarks in COMAGRI.*

ENDS

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