



Remarks by Executive Vice-President Fitto, Commissioner Hansen and Commissioner Várhelyi on the Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan

Brussels, 7 July 2026

Executive Vice-President Fitto

Good afternoon,

Today the College of Commissioners approved the EU Livestock Strategy.

This is another important delivery, after the Vision for Agriculture and Food.

Livestock is not only about agriculture.

It is about competitiveness.

It is about food security.

It is about our territories.

And it is about Europe's future.

And this strategy is about agriculture and Rural Development, Animal Welfare and Cohesion.

Different policies. One common objective. Make the livestock thrive.

Livestock is a very sensitive sector, and it is currently under significant pressure.

It faces multiple challenges: global competition, the need to remain profitable, and evolving expectations from society, on animal welfare and sustainability.

This Strategy aims to support the sector in responding to these challenges.

My colleagues will go through the strategy in detail and address its specific components. I will focus on two points.

First: this is a pragmatic strategy, where everyone plays on the same team.

Livestock farming is a resource. A resource we must support and help grow. Not only in volume, but in efficiency, sustainability, and digitalization.

This is not about opposing interests, but about shared responsibility. Producers, consumers, and environmental protection all play a role in Europe's development and wellbeing. This strategy is built on that principle.

A realistic, holistic view of livestock farming, in all its dimensions. Economic. Social. Environmental. Territorial.

Second: livestock farming is deeply linked to the territory.

Farmers cannot relocate. We agree on this. The link between livestock farming and its territory is not incidental. It has value. Economic. Social. Cultural.

Livestock products are much more than food.

They are the expression of a territory, of its history, of its culture. Every region of Europe has their own.

This is precisely the diversity we have a duty to protect. And this is why territorial solutions are at the heart of this strategy.

Together, we can make the livestock sector resilient, competitive, sustainable, territorially grounded, and an example of European excellence.

Thank you.

Commissioner Hansen

Good afternoon.

Before I present today's proposals, let me begin with a word for European farmers.

Over the past weeks, many have faced an exceptional heatwave. Across Europe, crops are suffering, animals are under stress, and farmers are struggling to keep working under unbearable conditions. And summer is not over yet.

To all of them, I want to express our solidarity. We see what you are going through. And we stand ready to support where possible.

Resilience is no longer an abstract concept.

And preparedness has become a necessity to anticipate risks, reduce vulnerabilities and give farmers the confidence to invest in the future.

This is also why we present today our Strategy for the EU livestock sector and our Protein Plan. They build up on the Vision for agriculture and food, presented in February last year, and complement each other.

Together, they aim to strengthen our food security, our strategic autonomy and fight depopulation in vulnerable rural areas. Empty land, especially at the Eastern border, is a security liability too.

Our EU livestock sector is a success story. It employs around 7 million people all over the Union.

It generates €400 billion in turnover per year and a positive trade balance of €37 billion.

Beyond pure economics, it keeps millions of hectares of grasslands alive and sustains rural communities.

But this success story is now at risk. Farmers are facing rising production costs, climatic events, animal diseases, paired with low profitability.

With these conditions, many farmers struggle to make the investments needed for the future because they can't make ends meet. We risk not attracting new people to the profession.

We see increasing exits from livestock farming, including in areas which are already at risk of land abandonment and depopulation.

In today's geopolitical context, this is no longer simply an agricultural issue. It is a strategic vulnerability.

Today, we present our plan to ensure that in our Union, livestock farming not only survives, but thrives. Supported by a strong protein sector.

As usual, my approach is grounded in dialogue. This strategy is the result of more than a year of discussions with farmers, Member States, industry, scientists and civil society.

It centers around resilience, competitiveness, sustainability, territorial balance and excellence. Let me mention some central elements

Resilience and preparedness are key. While the CAP and other MFF instruments will remain a key tool for support, the Commission will also work with financial institutions, including the EIB, to develop a financial schemes to manage risk.

It will cover climate-related insurance and reinsurance needs and extend support to risks linked to animal diseases.

We will optimise our CAP tools for risk management and guide Member States through CAP recommendations.

Animal diseases require our particular attention. As Oliver Varhelyi will explain, we will work on strengthening our response and tools.

Priority is prevention, early detection and early action.

Resilience also means that the livestock sector becomes less dependent on imported inputs. This is why we will support the increased supply of EU sustainable protein.

Our objective is clear: 35 by 35.

By 2035, the share of homegrown protein for feed should reach 35% in 2035, compared with 25% today.

Rewarding farmers for quality is at the heart of our action. Because change can never happen if the transition is not profitable for farmers, and if the costs are not equally distributed along the value chain.

This is why we propose to mainstream "European excellence" to valorise the highest standards, coupled with a clearer identification of EU origin.

This will help to communicate to the consumers and valorise production methods such as low-carbon production, environment-friendly practices, local feed use, and high animal welfare standards.

We have heard the calls on animal welfare and we intend to propose a targeted revision of rules to phase out cages for laying hens and broilers and transition from crates to pen systems for pigs. Oliver will explain in detail.

But this cannot be a one-way street. This revision represents an opportunity to introduce equivalent animal welfare requirements for imported products, in line with WTO obligations.

To support competitiveness, farmers can also benefit from new income opportunities created by circularity, renewable energy, better use of manure, new bio-based products.

Technological innovation like new feeding techniques to reduce emissions should be boosted.

Investing in sustainability is investing in farming's long-term future. The strategy presents a way forward on both emissions reduction and enhanced effort to ensure environment protection.

I cannot stress this enough: our approach must be tailored to local realities and build on the diversity of our livestock sector.

We start on a good basis; our sector is the most efficient in the world.

A combination of policy tools, innovation in feeding strategies and genetics, technology and research will allow us to continue to deliver emissions reductions.

Reducing environmental externalities remains a priority. The upcoming CAP recommendations will provide tailored guidance to Member States on how to address their specific environmental issues, including in areas with high livestock concentrations.

Our new livestock Platform will serve a tool to disseminate good practices, experience and knowledge and innovation.

But, let me end with a warning: our ambition will only become reality if all actors of the supply chain work together, from farmers to consumers, from the EU and to national and regional levels.

For example, through better advisory services, processing capacity and storage.

And by ensuring a stable demand for the supply of animal and protein products.

Public procurement, particularly in school canteens, as well as the EU school scheme, will also help to raise awareness of these products and encourage their consumption.

Like this, we are not imposing diets, we are promoting choice of sustainable products and high-quality EU products.

Finally, I want stress once more that livestock and plant proteins are complementary.

Together, they build more resilient farming systems, healthier soils, stronger value chains and greater strategic autonomy.

We want the EU to remain a global leader in quality,
in environmental and climate action,
in animal welfare,
in diversity,
while preparing for risks,
remaining competitive and ensuring our food security.
This is the ambition presented in our livestock strategy and protein plan.

Commissioner Várhelyi

Ladies and gentlemen,

You have already heard from Executive Vice-President Fitto and Commissioner Hansen on the wider importance of today's Livestock Strategy.

So let me complement their remarks by focusing on two areas at the core of my portfolio: animal health and animal welfare.

Both are essential for a resilient livestock sector.

They matter for farmers.

They matter for food sovereignty.

They matter for our rural communities, our economy, our trade, our biodiversity - and our public health.

Because when animals are healthy and well cared for, farms are stronger, food systems are more secure and rural communities are more resilient.

That is why animal health and animal welfare are at the core of today's Strategy.

But today this resilience is being tested.

Animal diseases are becoming more frequent, less predictable and more interconnected.

Over the past three years, Europe has faced serious outbreaks of diseases that were once considered rare in the EU.

We have seen first-hand the devastating consequences.

For farmers.

For families.

For rural communities.

And for the economy.

The EU Animal Health Law gives us a solid, science-based framework to protect animal health and the Single Market.

It includes biosecurity, surveillance, movement restrictions and regionalisation.

And we know these tools work.

But we need to do more. As the risks evolve, our approach must evolve too.

The evaluation of the Animal Health Law adopted yesterday confirms that the framework is strong and effective - but also shows where it must improve.

And our approach must be based on the simple principle: that prevention is better than cure.

We need stronger preparedness, better early warning systems and faster detection of outbreaks.

Digital technologies can help us identify risks earlier.

Targeted EU funding can strengthen national surveillance and response capacities.

Vaccination must also play a greater role in our toolbox.

Vaccination should not replace biosecurity or disease control measures.

But it can complement them as part of a modern, science-based approach to prevention.

This is why the Commission has already asked European Food Safety Authority to review the categorisation criteria and specific challenges of vector-borne diseases.

EFSA will also provide updated scientific opinions on:

- how different animal diseases should be listed and categorised
- and on how vaccination can best be used in different scenarios, whether for emergency response or prevention.

But of course none of this can be achieved without adequate investment.

Animal health funding is an investment in resilience, food security, public health and the competitiveness of our livestock sector.

We also need financial incentives to strengthen veterinary capacity and improve biosecurity on farms.

Our efforts must also extend beyond Europe's borders.

We need stronger engagement with international partners to secure wider recognition of the EU's approach, including regionalisation and vaccination.

This is vital to ensure that our farmers remain globally competitive.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The resilience of our livestock sector also relies on ensuring animals being kept in conditions that allow them to thrive.

European citizens, including our farmers, care deeply about animal welfare - and rightly so.

But animal welfare is not only an ethical objective. It is also part of a strong, healthy and competitive livestock sector.

Better welfare means healthier animals.

It helps reduce stress, strengthen immune systems and prevent injuries.

And farmers know this best. They know their animals. They understand their needs.

That is why our approach must work with farmers - supporting practical improvements that make sense on the ground.

This is the spirit behind the Commission's work to modernise the EU animal welfare framework through targeted revisions of the current legislation.

By the end of this year, we will present proposals on laying hens and broilers.

A proposal on pigs will follow next year.

Our main objective is to follow-up on the European Citizens' Initiative "End the cage age".

We also intend to respond to citizens' expectations by proposing to end the systematic killing of male day-old chicks.

Innovation will be important here too.

New technologies and digitalisation can be game-changers, so we will incentivise the uptake of modern tools and techniques.

But the transition must be practical and proportionate.

Farmers need time to adapt.

And they need access to financial support, including through the European Investment Bank, to help

them adapt and invest in better animal welfare.

We will also look at how to ensure a level playing field.

Imports from third countries should comply with the same or equivalent standards as those applied in the EU.

And we must do more to promote the value of Europe's high animal welfare standards on global markets.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude with one important point.

These proposals will not be designed from Brussels alone.

They are built on a broad consultation process with stakeholders, including civil society and farmers.

And as we bring these proposals forward, their views will be well reflected.

Thank you.

SPEECH/26/1548

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