

# Brussels reviews sustainable food policy

## Bloc concern after Russia invasion as grain and fertiliser imports fall

ANDY BOUNDS — BRUSSELS

The EU is reviewing the bloc's sustainable food strategy after a concerted push against the planned reforms by national governments, farmers and the agriculture industry.

Two years ago Brussels agreed to reform its farm practices as part of a drive to eliminate net carbon emissions by 2050. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine has seen a drop in grain and fertiliser exports from those countries and raised concerns over food security.

The bloc's agriculture ministers meet today to discuss short-term measures to alleviate the risk of shortages and price rises and possible changes to its Farm to Fork sustainable food strategy.

Emmanuel Macron, France's president, said the sustainable food strategy was "based on a pre-Ukraine war world" and should be reviewed.

The plans would lead to a 13 per cent drop in food production, he said on Friday. Macron needs the votes of the country's powerful farming lobby in elections next month but similar concerns are being raised in other member states such as Spain and Italy.

The conflict has sent the price of wheat, maize and other staple foods soaring. The EU gets half of its maize

from Ukraine and a third of its fertiliser from Russia. Fertiliser prices increased 170 per cent last year because of high gas prices. The EU is likely to face price rises but not shortages, according to recent European Commission assessments.

The €58bn a year Common Agricultural Policy, which still consumes more than a third of the bloc's annual budget, has enabled the EU to become a net food exporter. In recent years subsidies linked to production have been reduced and switched towards payments for environmental schemes. Pesticide use has decreased with more and more substances banned.

Decoupling subsidies entirely from production to help meet the EU's net zero emissions commitments was

deemed too controversial, so Brussels adopted targets for 2030 under its Farm to Fork strategy. They include cutting fertiliser use by a fifth, halving the use of antibiotics and increasing the amount of land farmed organically from 9 per cent to 25 per cent.

The sustainable use of pesticides directive, which aimed to cut their use in half and could increase food prices, was expected to be approved this week but has been delayed, according to officials.

Copa and Cogeca, the EU farmers' lobby group, has sent a list of demands to Janusz Wojciechowski, the European agriculture commissioner.

It wants to increase fertiliser imports, pesticide use and cultivation of crops for

animal feed while calling for opt-outs from ecological schemes and climate-linked animal welfare standards.

Pekka Pesonen, secretary-general of Copa-Cogeca, said the best way to reduce carbon emissions was to increase productivity. He wants new technologies permitted that would allow gene editing to improve the output of animals and plants.

Civil society groups and non-governmental bodies are pressing Wojciechowski to resist. "Watering down the Farm to Fork strategy and its policies will maintain Europe's dependence on non-renewable energy sources like fossil fuels, and will go against what is needed now to secure food for all," said a letter from the Food Policy Coalition.