

# The Common Agricultural and Food Policy of the European Union: An Assessment of its Framework, Stages and Regulations

Halil Günay<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Kocaeli University, European Union Studies, 41380, Kocaeli, Türkiye*

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## Abstract

Agriculture (production) and food (consumption) are two important political fields that affect each other and have direct links. Agriculture and food, which have a vital function in human life, affect many areas, especially the economy of farmers and people and are interrelated. Therefore, the Common Agricultural and Food Policy is one of the most important common policy areas for the European Union, both in terms of budget and other common policies. The importance of this common policy increases especially for the smooth and smooth functioning of the common market. In this context, this study investigates the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community of the European Union and the Common Agricultural Policy established in line with the Treaty's objective of establishing a common market. Under the influence of global and regional events, state and non-state actors have protectionist and revisionist tendencies in some political areas. The European Union, which is an important non-state actor in the international system in global and regional areas, has made protectionist-centered revisions in some political areas due to both its internal dynamics and the global and regional events in the system. One of the political areas in which the European Union has made revisions is the Common Agricultural Policy. The Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union has been updated in line with its needs, especially regarding food security and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero.

**Keywords:** Common Agricultural Policy, European Union, Common Agricultural Policy Reform, Food Policy.

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## 1. Introduction

The Common Agricultural Policy first emerged with the 1958 Strea Conference following the Treaties of Rome (1957) (Fearne, 1998). In the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community, the main objective of the European integration process was economic integration. Articles 38 and 47 of this treaty included provisions on the Common Agricultural Policy. These provisions cover commercial issues such as the free movement of agricultural products in the countries within the European Economic Community in the establishment of the common market, which is one of the most important stages of economic integration (Ülger, 2015).

France, the founding member of the European Economic Community, is the country with the strongest agriculture among the other member

countries. Therefore, it emerged with the influence of France, which was the dominant power of the European Economic Community at that time. Later on, the Common Agricultural Policy became the most important common policy of the European Union. In this framework, half of the European Union budget was used to finance the Common Agricultural Policy (Akder, 2016).

When we look at the European integration process, it is seen that it is a dynamic structure. It provides this dynamic structure with reforms. The European Union is making the Common Agricultural Policy reforms, especially in the food system. The main reason for this is that the greenhouse gas emission in agricultural production is around 10% (EEA, 2020). At the regional level, when measured about the food system, greenhouse gas emissions increase by approximately 30% (Crippa et al., 2021).

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\* Corresponding Author: Halil Günay  
Email: hall.gunay@gmail.com  
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This study focuses on the food policy of the European Union. The European Union has established policies to ensure food security in the Common Agricultural Policy and to create a sustainable food system. In this context, the European Union has prioritized our important elements in its food policy. Firstly, the European Union is to be an agricultural and food producer at the global and regional levels. The second is to focus on environmentally sustainable methods of food policy. The third is to ensure that the food policy is harmonized with the environment and health strategy in the member states of the Union. Finally, it is to correct the complexity of food policy in the European Union. When these four elements are taken together, the European Union takes into account not only its domestic policy but also the global food system (European Union, 2023).

One of the most important issues in the food policy of the European Union is food safety. In this framework, the European Union focuses its food safety policy on four main areas of protection: food hygiene, plant health, animal health, contaminants and residues. This requires the protection of all food business operators and food importers, from farms to restaurants. Therefore, the four main areas of food safety protection must be complied with by the member states of the Union (European Union, 2023).

The European Union food safety policy aims to protect human health and consumer interests and at the same time to support the smooth functioning of the European single market. These two objectives are vital for maintaining both public health standards and economic stability within the EU (Fact Sheets on the European Union, 2023).

The "Farm to Fork" strategy, which is a continuation of the Green Deal (2019) proposal, was prepared by the European Commission in May 2020.

The European Commission is taking measures to ensure food safety with the "Farm to Table" strategy. With this strategy, the European Union endeavors to ensure a high level of food safety as well as animal and plant health. This approach includes effective control systems and regular assessments to ensure compliance with the standards of the *acquis*. Such measures aim to ensure an efficient internal market by balancing safety with market efficiency (European Commission, 2023).

The European Union has put the "Food Sustainability Strategy" on the agenda to ensure food safety. This strategy is designed to protect the environment, ensure the availability of healthy food for all, and at the same time secure the livelihoods of

farmers. This approach takes into account the entire food system, from production to consumption and waste management, and recognizes its significant impact on the environment, health and food security (News European Parliament, 2021).

The above-mentioned policies and strategies emphasize the European Union's commitment to creating a safe, sustainable and economically viable food system that benefits both consumers and producers for the Member States of the Union.

Events in the international system, both within the internal dynamics of the European Union and globally, affect the European Union. This study investigates the Common Agricultural and Food Policy, which is one of the common policy areas affected by the European Union. In this context, this study asks the question "Under what conditions and for what reasons has the Common Agricultural and Food Policy of the European Union been revised within the framework of the historical process?".

The assumption related to the research question is that the European Union has made security-oriented revisions in the Common Agriculture and Food Policy on the issues they need both due to internal dynamics and global and regional events.

This study consists of five chapters. In the first part, the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy and Food Policy of the European Union in the context of legislation and the issues it deals with are explained. The second part provides an overview of the European Union's agricultural and food policy arrangements. In the third part, the European Union food policy has many important milestones that have shaped its current outlook. These milestones are discussed within the framework of the European Union's evolving approach to agriculture, food security and sustainable development. In the fourth section, an assessment of the practical outcomes, successes and challenges of European Union food policy is presented through some selected case studies. Finally, the future of food policy is analyzed in detail below.

## **2. European Union Common Agricultural Policy and Food Policy Framework**

Since food policy is directly related to the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy is first explained in this section and then food policy is discussed.

After the Treaty of Rome, the European Union tried to establish policies to ensure a sustainable transition to agriculture. These efforts were made through the Common Agricultural Policy. In the European Union, the Common Agricultural Policy is within the scope of shared authority. However, the budget and framework of the Common Agricultural Policy are largely determined by the European Union (Akder, 2016).

Environmental objectives in the Common Agricultural Policy started to be integrated into the European Union in the 2000s (Feindt, 2010). Environmental policy was included in the European Union *acquis* with the European Single Act. The increase in environmental awareness in the European Union with the global climate crisis has also affected the Common Agricultural Policy. As a result of this effect, environmental legislation came into force in the Common Agricultural Policy and the most important among these legislations are; "Nitrates Directive (1991), the Pesticides Regulation (1991), the Habitats Directive (1992), the Water Framework Directive (2000), and the National Emissions Ceiling Directive (2001)". These legislations include issues such as irrigation of agricultural land to address problems on human health and the environment in general (Matthews et al., 2023).

Apart from the above-mentioned legislation, the European Union has enacted legislation on food safety and consumer protection. This legislation was adopted in 2002 under the name of "General Food Law". The emergence of the law was influenced by a series of food-related epidemics at the global and regional levels. This legislation created the "Farm to Table" strategy, which covers all areas related to food (Matthews et al., 2023).

The European Union's food policy is based on production, consumption and regulation. This policy covers basic issues such as "Policy Making and Regulation, Public Health and Safety, Agricultural Policies, Trade and Market Dynamics, Environment and Ethical Issues, Consumer Rights and Information and Socio-Economic Dimensions".

European Union food policy is the policy governing the food industry. This policy covers the regulation, development and implementation of issues related to the field of food. European Union food policy is therefore designed to ensure food safety, quality and sustainability. It includes regulations on the production, processing, distribution, labeling and marketing of food (Artık, 2011).

One of the primary focal points of EU food policy is the protection of public health and consumer safety. This includes setting food safety standards, managing foodborne diseases, regulating additives and chemicals in food and ensuring that food products are safe for consumption (Çeltek, 2004).

The Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union is at the centre of food policy. The Common Agricultural Policy shapes how food is produced in the European Union, affecting everything from agricultural subsidies to environmental practices in agriculture. It aims to support farmers, promote sustainable agriculture and ensure food security (Adıgüzel, 2008).

Food policy also involves managing trade in food products both within the European Union and between the European Union and other countries. This also includes negotiating trade agreements, setting tariffs and addressing issues such as food standards and geographical indications in international trade (Eurostat, 2022).

The European Union's approach to food policy increasingly includes environmental sustainability and ethical considerations. Food policy includes not only environmental ethical issues but also the promotion of organic farming, reduction of food waste and addressing the effects of climate change on agriculture (Türkiye Başbakanlık Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı Müsteşarlığı, 2007).

In food policy, important regulations have been made especially for consumers. In these regulations, the right of consumers to have accurate information such as the content and expiry date of the food they buy has been ensured. In fact, this includes labelling laws that inform consumers about the origin, ingredients and nutritional content of food products (European Commission, 2023a).

Food policy in the European Union also addresses socio-economic issues such as the impact of farmers on food prices. The aim is to balance economic growth with social equity and fair trade practices (European Commission, 2023b).

In conclusion, the Common Agricultural and food policy in the European Union aims to ensure a safe, sustainable and fair food system for the citizens of the Member States. In order to achieve this goal, the European Union implements a series of legislations and policies. Therefore, the Common Agricultural Policy and food policy is a broad and multifaceted area.

### **3. Stages in the Food Policy of the European Union: Basic Policies and Regulations**

Food policy in the European Union has been continuously amended and adjusted within the framework of both global and regional developments. In this section, food policy has gone through a number of stages to adapt to changing social, economic, environmental and technological realities. In this section, the main stages are explained with an overview.

The origins of the European Union's food policy date back to the aftermath of the Second World War. The main concern in this period was food security and the reconstruction process of Europe, which was damaged after the war. Therefore, the focus of food policy at that time was on increasing agricultural productivity and ensuring a stable food supply (Akder, 2016). For this reason, European countries started the integration process of Western European countries in order to ensure peace in Europe, to correct the economic structure that deteriorated after the war and to stabilize the relationship between countries. These situations have led to the reorganization of the food system in Europe, as it is directly related to all issues related to the food field in Europe.

After the Treaty of Rome, European integration, in line with the goal of establishing a common market, member countries have entered into a process of cooperation and partnership in different policy areas. In this context, the countries within the European Economic Community have taken steps to establish cooperation and partnership in the field of Common Agricultural Policy. In this framework, the Common Agricultural Policy, which became the cornerstone of the European Union food policy, was established in the early 1960s. Initially, the Common Agricultural Policy aimed to increase agricultural production, ensure a fair standard of living for farmers, stabilize markets, ensure the availability of supply and provide reasonable prices for consumers (Akder, 2016).

After the Second World War, European countries recovered with the European integration process. This recovery of European countries has strengthened especially the agricultural sector and agriculture has become the focal point of food policies. Especially at this focal point, the quality and safety of food has been emphasized. Food crises such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy or mad cow disease outbreak in Europe have brought up issues related to the

reorganization of food policy in the European Union. The European Union has prioritized two important issues in the food crisis that it has taken back to the agenda. The first of these issues is food safety, while the other is the implementation of food quality standards (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017).

The European integration process started with six countries and has continuously expanded to strengthen the European Union within the framework of regional and global developments. These enlargements of the European Union have created a number of new challenges or opportunities for organizations and countries. Challenges or opportunities have affected not only safety and quality in European Union food policies but also competitiveness in global markets. Therefore, the legislation that the European Union has created by taking these issues into account has also included the integration of environmental sustainability in the field of food into agricultural policies (Garzon, 2006).

The European Union has increasingly focused on sustainability in its post-2010 food policies. The "Farm to Fork" strategy, which is part of the European Green Deal, is the clearest example of this focus. The strategy aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. In line with this aim, the European Union has addressed reforms on issues such as reducing the environmental and climate footprint of food production, ensuring food security in the face of climate change and promoting sustainable food consumption (EuroHealth, 2019).

European Union food policies have faced various current challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, sustainable use of natural resources, technological innovations (such as biotechnology and digital agriculture), and food quality and authenticity. Ongoing global trade dynamics, health considerations and consumer awareness have also significantly influenced the food policy orientations of the European Union (Akder, 2016).

Overall, food policy change in the European Union reflects a gradual shift from a primary focus on production and quantity to a more nuanced approach that balances economic, social and environmental objectives. This change poses new challenges to the European Union food policy and the European Union is trying to tackle these challenges by introducing new reforms in the field of food.

#### **4. Political and Economic Events Shaping the European Union Agricultural Policy**

The food policy of the European Union has many important milestones that have shaped its current outlook. These milestones have been realized within the framework of the European Union's evolving approach to agriculture, food security and sustainable development.

The Common Agricultural Policy has been established as one of the main policies of the European Union. As mentioned before, in general, the Common Agricultural Policy aims to increase agricultural productivity, ensure a fair standard of living for farmers, stabilize markets, ensure a safe food supply and provide reasonable prices for consumers. In line with this objective, the Common Agricultural Policy has been a central element in shaping food policy in order to maintain the agriculture and food sector of the European Union in a more systematic and orderly manner (Fearnle, 1998).

The Single European Act brought the first important institutional changes in the European Coal and Steel Treaty and the Treaties of Rome. The Single European Act, which was the treaty that set 1992 as the target for the establishment of the common market, authorized the European Economic Community in a number of areas such as "Agricultural Policy" and "Environmental Policy". Therefore, the European Single Act is important in terms of laying the foundations of the single market, including the free movement of goods, which significantly affects food trade and policy within the member countries of the Union (Arat et al., 2016).

The European Single Act emerged in order to solve the problems arising after the enlargement of the European Economic Community and to set new targets. The emergence of the Single Act has led to a number of innovations and reforms in the field of agriculture and food. These innovations and reforms have had positive reflections on agriculture and food. However, the food crisis at the global and regional level has led the European Union to reconsider its food policy. In this context, the widespread outbreak of Spongiform Encephalopathy, also known as mad cow disease, in Europe has been a critical event for the European Union's food policy. The member states of the Union have implemented the reforms that the European Union has put into effect at the institutional level after this outbreak. These reforms have led to increased regulation and supervision in food safety, with stricter standards and measures to ensure meat

and animal safety in general (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2017).

After the mad cow outbreak, the European Union tried to overcome the deficiencies in the food crisis not only with reforms but also by establishing an institution. The name of this institution is the European Food Safety Authority. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was established to provide independent scientific advice and communication on risks associated with the food chain. This step of the European Union is very important in terms of institutionalizing food safety and increasing consumer confidence in food (EFSA, 2016).

The Common Agricultural Policy has undergone various reforms after the Maastricht Treaty. These reforms were put into effect through "MacSharry Reform (1992), Berlin Treaty for Agenda 2000 (1999) and Luxemburg reform (2003)". In these three reforms; quality in agriculture, environmental sustainability and rural development were included. In addition, the European Union has also implemented measures such as cross harmonization, direct payments and rural development programmes (Akder, 2016).

The European Union has enacted the Food Information for Consumers Regulation, which emphasizes that food should be labelled with a list of ingredients on the packaging, indicating the ingredients in the product and products that may cause allergies (Peterman et. al. 2023). This regulation is important in terms of clarifying food labelling for the health of consumers. In particular, the clarity and accessibility of food information on the presence of allergens, which is vital for consumer protection, has been improved following this regulation (European Commission, 2023c).

The European Union's "Farm to Table" strategy (2020) aims to reduce food waste, protect nutrition and human health, prevent food fraud and make food environmentally friendly. This strategy is important as it integrates food policy with environmental sustainability and aims to reduce the environmental impact of the food sector and contribute to climate change mitigation (European Commission, 2020).

With the "Farm to Table" strategy, the European Union has addressed and evaluated the issue of production and consumption together. It has also approached the change in production and consumption in a more holistic and coordinated manner (Matthews et al., 2023).

The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including measures to ensure the continuity of the food supply chain and support to the agricultural sector, marks a new turning point in food policy, emphasising the importance of resilience in food systems. In addition, the European Union has focused primarily on agricultural productivity and market stability, but also on food safety, sustainability, environmental issues, and consumer information and protection.

## 5. Crises in European Union Food Policy

The case studies provide valuable insights into the practical results, achievements and challenges of European Union food policy. Here are some notable case studies:

**The Horse Meat Scandal:** In 2013, it was revealed that foods purporting to contain beef were in fact made from horse meat. This scandal raised serious concerns about food labelling and traceability in the European Union. The European Union strengthened its food safety and fraud detection systems and improved traceability and testing protocols (The Guardian, 2013).

**The Question of Banning Neonicotinoids to Protect Bees:** Neonicotinoids, a class of insecticides, have been found to be harmful to bees, leading to a decline in their populations. The European Union Action Plan bans the outdoor use of three neonicotinoids to protect pollinators. This case highlights the European Union's commitment to environmental sustainability and its willingness to adjust agricultural practices towards ecological protection (The Economist, 2017).

**Implementation of the Farm-to-Fork Strategy:** The strategy aims to make the European Union food systems more sustainable. While progress has been made on food system regulations in the Strategy, there have been challenges in balancing the different interests of various stakeholders, including farmers, consumers and environmental groups. This is evidence of the European Union's commitment to integrating environmental concerns into food policy (European Commission, 2020).

**Covid-19 Pandemic:** The Covid-19 pandemic, which started in China in 2019 and then spread globally, has affected many areas in the European Union, especially agriculture and food. In particular, there have been problems with the "Farm to Table" strategy and the supply of agricultural and food products. The European Commission has prepared draft proposals to solve the crisis. In this draft, issues such as direct support to farmers and solving the problems of producers and

consumers in the field of agriculture and food were included. Therefore, the European Union reacted quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic to solve the problems affecting the Common Agricultural and Food Policy area. However, the use of direct support in the field of agriculture and food in the member states of the Union was not deemed sufficient (European Court of Auditors, 2023).

Therefore, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union has focused especially on agriculture and food. In the event of a crisis that poses risks and threats in the field of agriculture and food, the European Union has tried to create policies to reduce the problems associated with the sustainability of agriculture and food. In addition, the European Commission has proposed the opening of a "European Union Food Safety Observatory" in order to prevent similar disruptions in the event of such major crises in the future. With this proposal, the European Union aims to ensure the affordability of food and the availability of food supplies. In other words, the Observatory is intended to provide support against possible difficulties in production (agriculture) and consumption (food) (Fortuna, 2020).

**Ukraine War:** In the post-Cold War period, Russia and Ukraine have been at odds over many issues. These conflicts have negatively affected the relations between Russia and Ukraine. As a result, Russia first annexed Crimea in 2014. Then, in 2022, it intervened militarily to occupy Eastern Ukraine. Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has affected the European Union in the field of agriculture on the basis of the member states of the Union. Because the member states of the Union are dependent on Russia and Ukraine for food and fertilizers. After the war in Russia and Ukraine, it became difficult to import food and fertilizers from these countries, which endangered food security in the European Union. The European Union has tried to solve this problem through international cooperation. In addition, support was provided to farmers within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (European Commission, 2023).

These case studies illustrate the complexity of food policy in the European Union. They also reflect the dynamic nature of the food policy environment, showing how the European Union is moving forward on issues ranging from food safety and fraud to environmental protection and trade relations.

## 6. The Future of Food Policy in the European Union

The Common Agricultural Policy, which was established in 1958 in line with the objectives of the Treaty of Rome of the European Union, continues to be the most important common policy area of the European Union despite all the reforms it has undergone for nearly 60 years. Since half of the European Union's budget is allocated to this policy area, it has been discussed at every stage of the European Union and in which areas the future steps should be taken (Brady et al., 2009).

In 2017, the European Commission conducted a survey entitled "Modernizing and Simplifying the Common Agricultural Policy". According to the results of this survey, the Common Agricultural Policy needs to be adapted to the conditions of the period in order to better address the problems experienced at the global and regional level. In particular, it should minimize air pollution from agricultural sources in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the context of climate change. This is very important for human health. Therefore, the European Union needs to continuously improve issues related to human health, such as labeling of food products within the framework of food safety. It should also support local food production and consumption, such as the "Farm to Table" strategy. This support strengthens local farmers and their relationship with the market (European Commission, 2017).

The future of food policies in the European Union is poised to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities, influenced by technological advances, climate change and changing consumer preferences.

It focuses on the development of agricultural practices that are compatible with climate change, including drought-resistant crops and sustainable water management. Emphasis is placed on reducing the carbon footprint of the food sector and increasing carbon sequestration in agriculture (European Commission, 2020).

The European Commission has prepared a draft Common Agricultural Policy from 2023 to 2027. It was adopted on December 2, 2021 and entered into force on January 1, 2023. This new legislation is crucial for securing the future of agriculture and food, as well as achieving the target set in the Green Deal (European Commission, 2023d).

In the 2023-2027 Common Agricultural Policy process, the highest proportion of the European Union

budget is allocated to the Common Agricultural Policy. The money allocated from this budget is committed to support projects related to scientific research and innovation, in particular to secure a sustainable agricultural sector (European Commission, 2023d).

In the new Common Agricultural Policy reform, the Union has prepared strategic plans for each of the member states to identify their specific needs. In these plans, the European Union aims to create fairer and more performance-based countries, taking into account the needs of farmers and environmental and climate objectives. However, this strategic plan does not take into account that the functioning of the common market is not impaired and that the institutions are not overburdened (Council of the European Union, 2023).

The future of food policies in the European Union is likely to be shaped by a combination of several factors that require adaptive and forward-looking policies. While the European Union's food policies will be guided by the evolving environment at the global and regional level, issues such as balancing the needs for environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social equity will remain at the center of the European Union's focus.


## 7. Conclusion

As we have explored, the realm of food politics in the European Union is a dynamic and multifaceted domain, encompassing a broad range of policies, regulations, challenges, and opportunities. From the inception of the Common Agricultural Policy to the current focus on sustainable food systems under the Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Union has continually evolved and adapted its approach to food policy. This evolution reflects the EU's commitment to addressing complex issues such as food safety, environmental sustainability, public health, and socio-economic equity.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that they have no financial or non-financial competing interests.

## Author's Contributions

H. Günay (  [0000-0003-1503-7415](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1503-7415)): *Definition, Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Writing, Editing.*

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