

Article – Covid-19: emergency measures to help EU farmers and fishermen



In order to avoid disruption to food supplies, the EU has taken urgent measures to support food producers.

Main problems faced by food producers

While delays to cross border flows of agriculture goods were solved by the introduction of so-called [green lanes](#), which allow the circulation of vehicles transporting critical goods, the aquaculture, agriculture and fish sectors still face serious difficulties.

Food producers face labour shortages due to the suspension of the free movement of seasonal workers, on who they rely heavily. The European Commission has said they can be considered as critical workers, but understandably, many don't wish to leave home. Lower production could in turn have an impact on prices. In addition, the agriculture sector has lost major clients with the closure of hotels and restaurants.

Support for fishermen and aquaculture

During the plenary session on 17 April, MEPs approved financial assistance for [hard-hit fishing communities and aquaculture farmers](#). Fisheries are facing logistical difficulties in ports, increased freight prices for shipping fish products, trade restrictions with non-EU countries, a collapse in prices, loss of markets, concerns over crew safety and limited possibilities for crew rotation due to quarantine.

A number of emergency measures will help the sectors, including increased possibilities for state aid and the introduction of support measures through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, which will be made more flexible.

EU countries will be able to provide [support](#) to:

- Fishermen for the temporary cessation of fishing activities
- Aquaculture farmers for the temporary suspension or reduction of production
- Producer organisations for the temporary storage of fishery and aquaculture products

How is the EU helping farmers?

On 15 April Parliament's agriculture committee welcomed the Commission's [plans to help the agri-food sector](#), but called for more targeted action, including market measures such as private storage. MEPs also called for the activation of the crisis reserve to help struggling agricultural sectors and said EU farm policy will need adequate long-term budget support in the post-Covid period.

Among the measures are the reallocation of unused agriculture funds to fight the effects of the crisis in rural areas. A more flexible and simplified European agriculture fund for rural development will allow for loans or guarantees at favourable conditions such as very low interest rates or favourable payment schedules to cover operational costs of up to €200,000.

The Commission has also proposed to cut the number of physical on-farm checks, to extend the deadline for farmers to apply for direct payments and rural development payments by one month to 15 June 2020 and to increase the advances of these payments from mid-October.

As regards [seasonal workers](#), who are crucial for planting, tending and harvesting, EU countries are encouraged to treat them as critical workers, exchange information on their needs and ensure their smooth passage across borders.

Find out what other [measures the EU has taken](#) to combat the pandemic.