



# Sustainability of Agrifood Systems:

Key Challenge for EU Market Competitiveness in the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector



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This edition of policy papers is developed to assist the civil society and citizens, in general, engage in an informed debate and have access to expert knowledge, views and opinions on topics of importance for EU integrations. Areas in which the Republic of North Macedonia will lead its EU accession negotiations are both complex and diverse, while reforms that need to be implemented will open many dilemmas that necessitate an expert debate. For more contents produced under the project “CSO Dialogue – Platform for Structural Participation in EU Integrations” , visit the website: [www.dijalogkoneu.mk](http://www.dijalogkoneu.mk)

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## ***List of Abbreviations***

**FAO** United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization

**SDGs** United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

**CSOs** civil society organizations

**LEADER** Liaison entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale, i.e. Links between Actions for Development of the Rural Economy

**EU** European Union

**CAP** Common Agriculture Policy

**IPARD** Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Agriculture and Rural Development

**MAFWE** Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy

**NSARD** National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development

**AGENDA 2030** United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030

**NATURA 2000** EU Coordinated Network of Protected Areas in the World

## INTRODUCTION

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability of agrifood systems had already raised concerns in the region, especially due to increased obesity rates (around 23% of the population in Europe and 18% of the population in Central Asia)[1] and associated non-communicable diseases, including increase in undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in some countries.

The pandemic's impacts have put more pressure on the overall situation in respect to nutrition. There are no food shortages, but economic downturns and job losses have created more constraints for people to access nutritious food and healthy diets.

Regional food supply chains are functioning well, mainly due to the commitment of farmers, who have invested enormous efforts in producing and harvesting food despite the pandemic and lockdown measures. Across Europe and Central Asia, many small agricultural holdings and family farmers have reported using personal savings to cover operational costs at the expense of their household's living conditions. Moreover, 85% of them have stressed that survival of their business depends on continued government support to cover running costs.[2]

In our country, during the covid and post-covid period there was almost no government assistance outside already existing measures[3] for support of agriculture and rural development, except for freezing food prices, including those of vegetables, fruits and corn, and organization and participation in the green corridors.

In that context, adequate policies and public-private partnerships are needed to address the needs of food producers and to improve sustainability of agrifood systems. Related issues, such as food safety, preservation of biodiversity and digital innovation should be set high on the national, regional and EU agenda when it comes to sustainability of food production systems, especially among small family agricultural holdings that are dominant in our country and account for 80% of the overall structure of agricultural holdings.[4]

The most recent assessment by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)[5] suggests that the pandemic may add up to 132 million people to the underfed global population. Furthermore, around 4.5 billion people depend on agrifood systems for their existence as method for securing their own and livelihood of their families.

The pandemic underlined the importance of nobody being left behind as the main principle of UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. More than ever before, the governments, international

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[1] Factsheet – Healthy and sustainable diets. Key workstreams in the WHO European region (2021), available at: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/obesity/publications/2021/factsheet-healthy-and-sustainable-diets.-key-workstreams-in-the-who-european-region-2021>

[2] FAO: Transforming agrifood systems in Europe, Central Asia and beyond, available at: <https://northmacedonia.un.org/mk/98580-raka-pod-raka-za-transformacija-na-zemjodelsko-prekhranbenite-sistemi-vo-evropa-centralna>

[3] 2020 and 2021 National Programme on Rural Development, available at: [http://www.ipardpa.gov.mk/Root/mak/default\\_mak.asp](http://www.ipardpa.gov.mk/Root/mak/default_mak.asp)

[4] State Statistical Office, Structure and typology of agricultural holdings, available at: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija.aspx?id=79>

[5] The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021, FAO, available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4474en>

## Healthy food and sustainable agrifood systems: necessary for dealing with the challenge of securing food for everybody in the EU and the Western Balkans

Evolution in the context of food production, trade and consumption challenges the method of risk management in respect to food safety and availability for all. Actions are needed in all stages of the food chain, with systemic approach to protection of people's health, environment and cultures. Food safety is interwoven in all components of sustainable food safety systems and requires action and cooperation among different sectors, stakeholder groups and countries.

Different factors, including inadequate use of technologies for animal- or plant-based food production, complexity of food trades, and climate change - all impose new risks for emergence of diseases. In order to understand and reduce food safety risks, preventive measures and adequate response mechanisms should be in place. This requires thorough examination of links between the people's health and the health of animals and plants. Addressing challenges related to food safety is a continuous process of adjustments and improvements, even at the time of crisis, as noted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Decade of Action

International commitments are at a crucial turning point for attainment of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[6]. 2020 marked the Decade of Action in respect to attainment of the goals related to ending poverty and hunger, protecting the planet and ensuring progress for all. SDG2[7] (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture) emphasizes the need to ensure food safety by improving access to \*nutritious food through sustainable food systems.[8] Some 80% of the world's extremely poor people live in rural areas and most of them rely directly on agriculture for their livelihood. To improve sustainability of their lives, we must transform the way in which food is produced, processed, traded, consumed and wasted, to ensure that we can meet our future needs without degrading and depleting biodiversity and other natural resources on which we all rely.[9]

### Sustainable agricultural production in the Western Balkans

In the Western Balkans, agriculture and related sectors account for around 10% of GDP, while in some countries, agriculture, forestry and fisheries employ around 20% of the total labour force. In the case of Albania, this share accounts for high 40%.[10] However, in spite of the highly rich base of natural resources, the agriculture sector is facing many challenges, whereby large farms are a rare sight, while labour productivity and income are very low due to insufficient technology development, non-adjustment of production capacity and facilities with modern standards and the like. At the same time, food demand is growing both in terms of quality and quantity. Having in mind the growing tourist market and great export potential, the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, also known as Agenda 2030,[11] underlines the importance of application of EU standards in agrifood and primary production sectors, especially in respect to food safety, health of plants and animals, improving biological safety at animal farms, prevention, livestock breeding, and improving agricultural production output.

[6] 17 Sustainable Development Goals, available at:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable\\_Development\\_Goals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_Development_Goals)

[7] Sustainable Development Goal – 2, Zero Hunger, available at:

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

[8] FAO, Conclusions: World Food Day, International Conference 2020, available at:

<https://www.fao.org/3/ca9893mk/CA9893MK.pdf>

[9] Ibid, p.5

[10] <https://www.iucn.org/news/europe/201805/redirecting-eu-cap-payments-sustainable-farming>

[11] Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, available at:

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

[12] LEADER/CLLD, available at: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en)

Moreover, actions that should be taken in this field include strengthening sanitary controls across the food production chain, and establishing and maintaining electronic systems for food certification to ensure its safety. Also, Agenda 2030 indicates the need for work on awareness raising among consumers and promotion of the concept of sustainable nutrition. Hence, more efforts are needed in respect to promoting food whose production is environmentally safe and organic, and reducing use of synthetic chemicals in food production, such as pesticides, veterinary medicines and fertilizers.

Furthermore, Agenda 2030 underlines the need to strengthen cooperation between scientific and educational institutions with producers and processors in agrifood sectors to facilitate transition towards innovative and environmentally acceptable technologies and livestock breeding methods. As regards rural areas, LEADER programme[12] attempts to encourage development of local action groups, modernize asset ownership in the agrifood sector, and promote rural infrastructure under IPARD.[13] In this context, the emphasis is put on use of renewable energy sources and modern technologies, with adoption of measures for climate adjustments in agriculture.

## The Agenda 2030



Figure 1 – Agenda 2030 and UN Sustainable Development Goals

In the case of North Macedonia, **agriculture and rural development are key elements** of the overall economic progress and the country's accession in the European Union. Macedonian agriculture sector is comprised of relatively small agricultural holdings and family farms, whose main challenge is land fragmentation, as limiting factor for attainment of standards and provision of quantities needed to break through on international markets.

[12] LEADER/CLLD, available at: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en)

[13] EU Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD), available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/international-cooperation/enlargement/pre-accession-assistance/overview\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/international-cooperation/enlargement/pre-accession-assistance/overview_en)

According to FAO's study[14] on small agriculture holdings and family farms, which also covered the Republic of North Macedonia, they are considered an important part of the solution for food safety, reduction of rural poverty and environmental sustainability. Family farms are not able to alone utilize their potential for sustainable development, and therefore – in the opinion of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy – this type of farms needs to be supported with adequate national policies on rural development that would enable their transformation into successful local agri-businesses that will take the lead role in local community development.

### What does sustainable agricultural production mean?

Sustainable agricultural production is created as response to the need for designing methods of agricultural production that do not degrade natural resources, but offer high yields and income for agricultural producers.

Having in mind that agriculture heavily depends on ecosystem services, sustainable agriculture aims to reduce negative anthropogenic effects on the environment through efficient use, preservation and quality improvement of natural resources.

Preserved natural resources and improved quality of life within sustainable production systems are not only in the service of current, but also of future generations.

Sustainable agricultural production implies active participation of farmers in decision-making and specific benefit from economic development, good working conditions and good prices for their agricultural products.

Sustainable agriculture covers three aspects of sustainability: social, economic and environmental. Undermining any of these aspects brings under question sustainability of the other two. This is of crucial importance for long-term socio-economic development of any country, and especially of developing countries, because agriculture has strong impact on other sectors in the society and is one of the most important pillars of wellbeing and progress in the society.

*According to FAO, the concept of sustainable agriculture could be defined as integrated system of practices for plant and animal production that meets human need for food, maintains environment quality, implies high economic value and improves quality of life for farmers, local communities and the society as a whole.*

Advantages of sustainable agriculture are felt by all – from agricultural producers, who have direct economic benefits and better access to the market, through the economy and increased profits due to production of quality products, to consumers who are able to choose quality, safe and healthy food on the market.

[14] The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021, FAO, available at: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4474en>

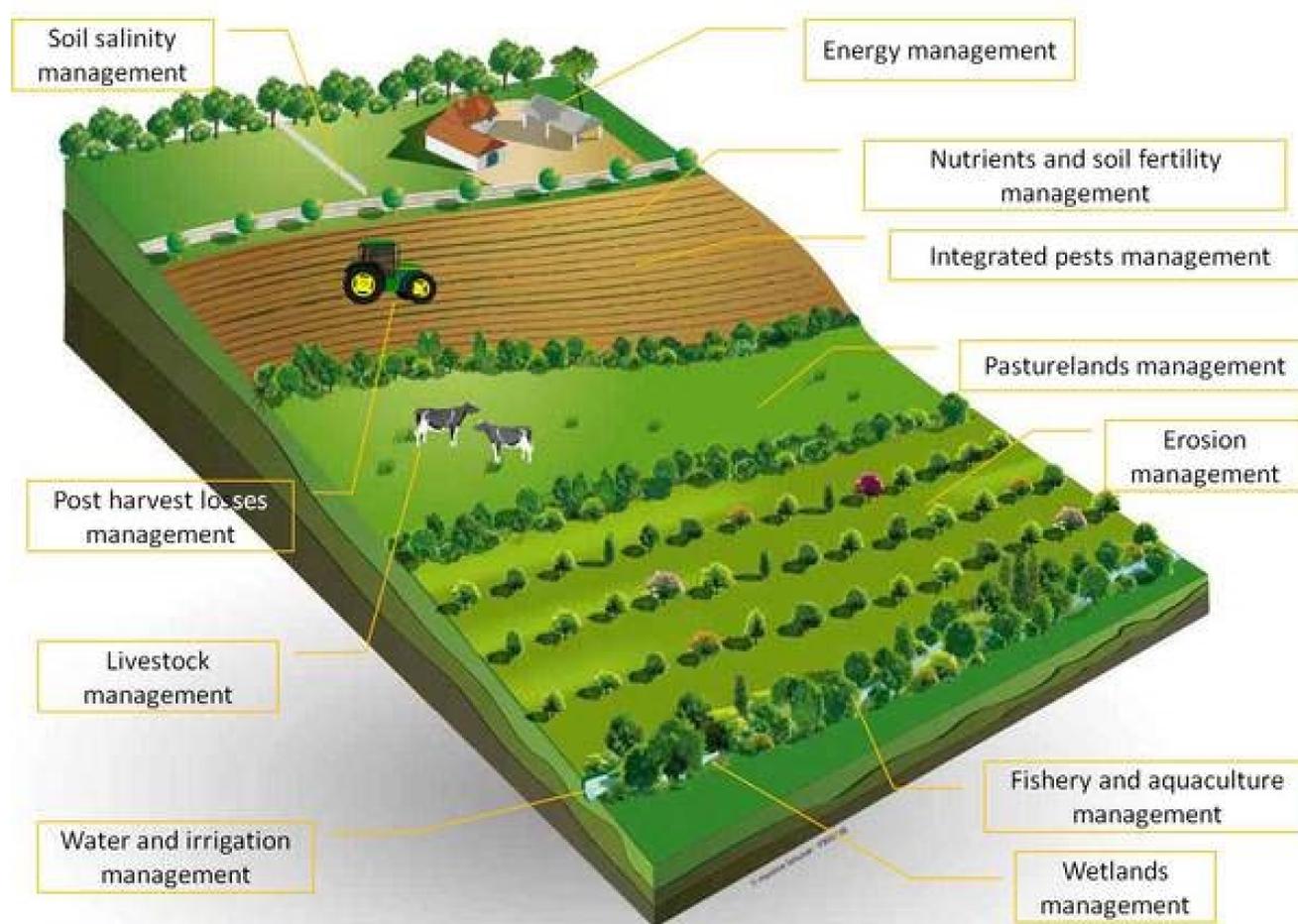


Figure 2 – Sustainable agricultural production [15]

### Development of rural economy

Sustainable agriculture impacts development of rural economy. Advancing knowledge and strengthening capacity of rural communities for transition to sustainable agriculture creates a potential for development of other economic activities that rely on such agriculture. In the last years, special attention was paid to the potential for “sustainable rural tourism”[16] as one of key sectors in the Western Balkans rural economy which contributes to creation of new jobs and additional income. For example, agricultural production of high natural value, as important aspect of sustainable agriculture, is closely linked to creation and maintenance of traditional areas in the Western Balkans, providing an opportunity for development of rural tourism, but also of eco-tourism or agri-tourism. Sustainable agricultural production could lead to sustainable economic future and better quality of life for rural communities.

### Promoting public health

Sustainable agriculture has the effect of promoting public health. By limiting use of pesticides and other chemical substances that are commonly applied in agriculture, rural communities in the Western Balkans are provided with healthy water, clear air and fertile land. Limited use of antibiotics and hormones in livestock breeding and raised standards on farm animal wellbeing improve safety and quality of animal-based food. By engaging in sustainable agriculture, consumers from rural and urban areas are provided safe and healthy food of natural origin that does not have negative effect on human health, but rather contributes to better health.

[15] Sustainable agriculture: Mixed cropping, Crop rotation, Mixed Farming;

<https://www.pmfias.com/sustainable-agriculture-organic-farming-biofertilizers/>

[16] Tourism development in Western Balkans: Towards a common policy,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347964526\\_Tourism\\_Development\\_in\\_the\\_Western\\_Balkans\\_Towards\\_a\\_Common\\_Policy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347964526_Tourism_Development_in_the_Western_Balkans_Towards_a_Common_Policy)

## Mitigating climate change effects

Sustainable agriculture contributes to mitigating climate change effects. Practices that impact climate change, including excessive use of artificial fertilizers, intensive livestock breeding, heavy use of pesticides and destruction of forests that are natural filters of greenhouse gases, are not represented in sustainable agriculture or are used in significantly lower scope. There are various methods of sustainable agriculture that could be used to protect farmers from climate change effects. Some of them are: adjustment of production to local climate conditions (mixed crops or farming indigenous species), foraging bare soil or land between crops for longer preservation of moist or placing reservoirs for capturing rain water.[17]

## EU investment in creating sustainable food production systems

Through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP),[18] the European Union is committed to ensuring high living standard for farmers, while setting conditions for health and wellbeing of animals, environmental protection and food safety. Under sustainable economic development, the EU assigns key importance to the agriculture sector.

In doing that, the European Union wants to ensure sustainability and competitiveness of its agriculture. To contribute to attainment of that objective, the EU finances market-oriented farmers, i.e. production that meets consumer demand, but also preserves the nature, health and wellbeing of animals. EU's annual budget allocated for this purpose amounts to around 59 billion euros, disbursed through the European Agriculture Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).[19] EU Biodiversity Strategy aims to prevent loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services by 2030. The EU nature acquis, i.e. Birds Directive and Habitats Directive, serve as the pillar of the biodiversity policy and legal basis for the network of protected natural goods (NATURA 2000). Namely, for the purpose of nature protection, the European Commission has established the environmental network called Natura 2000, the biggest coordinated network of protected areas in the world. It covers more than 18% of landlocked and around 6% of maritime territory of the European Union. It provides habitat for endangered species of plants and animals.[20] This network of areas for procreation and rest of rare and endangered species stretches across all EU countries and is also introduced in candidate countries. The purpose of this network is to ensure long-term survival of the most valuable and endangered species and habitats in Europe as enlisted in the *EU Birds Directive*[21] and *EU Habitats Directive*. [22] According to these directives, EU member-states must take action to protect endangered habitats and species in Europe.[23]

[17] Rural Coalition, Guide for Climate-Smart Agriculture Practices, 2021

[18] Common Agricultural Policy, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy_en)

[19] Kovachev Goran, Macedonian Agribusiness: Financing and Competitiveness; NUL St. Clement of Ohrid -Skopje, 2018, available at: [https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/62779/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_62779.pdf](https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/62779/1/MPRA_paper_62779.pdf)

[20] NATURA 2000, <http://natura2000.gov.mk/mk/>

[21] EU Birds Directive, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm)

[22] EU Habitats Directive, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm)

[23] Biodiversity Strategy 2030, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en)

**The EU Directives enlist 57 types of habitats and 257 species that depend on agricultural activities or are linked to various agricultural activities.**

The concept of high-value agricultural production is proposed as one of indicators for agriculture's impact on environment, species and habitats, which should be included in the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020.[24] As such, this concept will be applied through provisions laid down in Article 110[25] of the proposed CAP horizontal provisions (Council Regulation (EC) no. 1259/1999). Accordingly, EU member-states must provide data on this indicator in the context of the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Common Agricultural Policy. The legislative proposal for rural development in the period 2014-2020 includes biodiversity restoration and preservation in areas of high-value agricultural production as one of six EU rural development priorities.



[24] Monitoring and evaluation framework for the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/00da6abf-7c75-11e5-9fae-01aa75ed71a1>

[25] Council Regulation (EC) No 1259/1999, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31999R1259&from=EN>

## Innovative tools and approaches to tailored support

In response to challenges faced by the region, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has developed an access strategy for the Green Climate Fund[26], which resulted in two major projects in 2021 implemented in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan and concerned actions to address climate change challenges, normative and field work on land consolidation, and regional strategy on gender equality and analyses that contribute to strengthened position of rural women in the entire region.[27]

Also, FAO implements the Hand-in-Hand Initiative,[28] based on data and aimed at eliminating hunger and poverty in countries that must not be left out. The initiative disposes with sophisticated tools and analytics, such as the Geospatial Platform[29] and Data Lab[30] for statistical innovation to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development.

FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative is flexible and open to all countries. Countries can be beneficiaries and contributors at the same time, and it is based on 5 leading principles:

- Target the poorest countries in respect to sustainable agricultural food production systems;
- Match the poorer countries with those that are already successful in the practice on establishing sustainable food production systems;
- Contribute to attainment of UN Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030;
- Provide a framework for action;
- Create and build partnerships in establishment of sustainable agricultural production systems in all countries across the world.[31]



Figure 3 - The five principles of FAO's Hand-in-Hand Platform

[26] FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031; <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7099en/cb7099en.pdf>

[27] <https://northmacedonia.un.org/mk/98580-raka-pod-raka-za-transformacija-na-zemjodelsko-prekhranbenite-sistemi-vo-evropa-centralna>

[28] FAO: Hand-in-hand initiative; <https://www.fao.org/hand-in-hand/en/>

[29] <https://data.apps.fao.org/>

[30] <https://www.fao.org/datalab/website/web/home>

[31] Ibid,

The Food Coalition, proposed by the Government of Italy and led by FAO, is a new global alliance that will help its members deal with effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their food and agriculture systems, including a possibility for each FAO member – irrespective of being part of the European Union or not – to nominate rural areas/villages to join the project titled “1000 Digital Villages”, [32] which aims to transform villages or towns into digital centres, having in mind the fact that digitalization and rural tourism could be drivers for increasing resistance, diversification of farmer income and better operation. Rural development in our country should have in mind this project and possibilities for involvement therein, and should keep the pace with such developments.

### **North Macedonia on the path to aligning the national agriculture policy with EU norms in respect to creating sustainable agrifood systems**

Agriculture is the second sector in the country according to its share in the gross domestic product (GDP). [33] Agriculture is crucial for development of the entire economy, equitable regional development and preservation of vital rural areas by creating conditions for young generations to remain there. The COVID-19 pandemic further underlined the need for the population to be provided with healthy, safe, quality and diverse food of Macedonian origin. Provision of sufficient quantity of quality and safe food to meet the demand of domestic consumers and creation of value added products intended for placement on foreign markets also ensures better living standard for farmers and, indirectly, for the society as a whole.

Government of the Republic of Macedonia has defined the following goals in the agriculture sector [34]: by creating conditions for sustainable agriculture and modernizing primary and secondary agricultural production, to increase production output and raise the quality of Macedonian agricultural products, protect the environment, ensure food safety and animal wellbeing, i.e. to create competitiveness and added value of agricultural products, and meet in-country demand from domestic production. Competitiveness of agricultural products will inevitably ensure a dignified life for farmers and development of rural areas.

Policies in the agriculture sector need to be in compliance with general commitments and directions of the state concerning alignment with the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Hence, these policies should be aimed at developing the sector to operate under conditions of the European single market, with due consideration of needs and trends on the domestic market, as well as those on global markets. Essence of such policies should primarily target small family agricultural holdings that are able to specialize in high-quality agricultural production, organic production and traditional produce. For that purpose, the Government of RNM’s four-year work program (2020-2024) [35] enlists that the state will stimulate consolidation of small farms, will award state-owned land to actual producers to the extent that allows most cost-effective use of land, will support investment in modernization of agricultural and innovative agricultural production.

[32] <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1310435/icode/>

[33] Agriculture policy, available at: <https://vlada.mk/node/22511>

[34] Ibid. <https://vlada.mk/node/22511>

[35] Government’s Work Program 2020-2024, available at: <https://vlada.mk/programa/2020-2024>

Activities and measures envisaged as direct support for creation of **SUSTAINABLE AND COMPETITIVE AGRICULTURE** include:

- **Annual financial support in the amount of 200 million euros** for the agriculture policy, intended for creating conditions that enable sustainability of agricultural holdings that will work on increased production, quality of products, environmental protection, food safety, animal health and wellbeing, as well as modern and competitive agriculture and value added products.

*Comment:* This type of support usually ranges from 120 to 150 million euros, but often it is not paid timely, whereby large portion of non-disbursed payments in the current year are transferred for the next year, resulting in unrealistic presentation of the actual situation and effects from such financial support.

- **Timely payment of direct agriculture support**: 30% of the amount for basic measures within 30 days from application and 70% according to the calendar of payments, which should be regulated by law.

*Comment:* There is still no annual calendar of payments in place for farmers to be able to plan their production, although sustainability of agricultural production will greatly benefit from timely and planned payment of subsidies and other financial support.

- **Reduction of production costs** to improve competitiveness of agricultural produce.

*Comment:* As regards production costs, they need to have greater coverage to include procurement of raw materials, fertilizers, and the like. At the moment, the government perceives reduction of production costs only through the prism of so-called “green crude oil” measures that imply subsidies in the amount of 50% of production costs incurred by small agricultural holdings according to the size of arable land in their possession.

- **Establishment of intervention fund** as part of the direct payments programme.

*Comment:* Such fund is still not formed, while the National Programme on Rural Development 2018-2023 indicates 2022 as deadline year for its establishment.

- **Guarantee fund for crediting and financing agriculture and rural development projects**, together with provision of advisory support services under the fund.

*Comment:* Such fund should increase the financial capacity, but also stability and competitiveness of small agricultural holdings, making their agricultural production competitive and sustainable.

- **Investments in agriculture human capital** in terms of financial support for investments in the case of young and women farmers as project holders, and strengthening the system of education for farmers and provision of advisory support services concerning application of innovative and smart agricultural practices.

*Comment:* Some measures, especially those that imply financial support for activities of young farmers and women are implemented, but investments need to be focused on informal education of farmers and adoption of the Law on Advisory Support Services that would establish a new advisory system aimed to facilitate transition of agricultural holdings from traditional to modern, competitive and sustainable food production.

- **Adoption of rulebooks on doorstep sale of agriculture products** that will mitigate criteria for small agricultural holdings in respect to production and sales of secure and safe food.

*Comment:* These rulebooks are difficult for implementation in the field as criteria and conditions defined therein are met only by small family-owned vineries, although their enforcement was designed with broad scope and coverage of agricultural holdings.

Investment in rural infrastructure and availability of services in rural areas, as well as digitalization, should be positioned high on the list of priorities under the national agriculture policy, which has proved to be a major and key shortcoming, especially at the time of crisis.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

As regards the food system as a whole, it could be said that it is not a matter of an isolated, but rather coherent system that encompasses different laws, rulebooks and decisions that govern agriculture, food production, trade, food safety, seed material, environment, public health, rural development, worker rights, etc. Large number of policies have an impact on food, but do not fully understand the broad scope of food. The Law on Food Safety exclusively concerns safety of food, but does not refer to its nutrition value. On the other hand, regulations governing improved quality of food are not adequately linked to sustainable food production.

Nevertheless, first steps toward full coverage and adoption of EU policies and practices are already taken, especially with adoption of rulebooks on doorstep sale of fresh and processed plant- and animal-origin products. Entry into effect of these rulebooks opened new possibilities for small food businesses in terms of increasing their production, and created conditions for marketing safe and competitive products that are in line with sustainable food systems, European and global policies, and especially the EU's Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

In addition, legal regulations include several measures and national financial support schemes for agriculture and rural development created by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy that allow small producers to be competitive and promote their businesses, like measure 115 from the National Programme on Rural Development that financially supports family agricultural holdings led by women, aimed at creating sustainable agricultural production, or measure 7 on diversification of farms and development of businesses, which also includes agricultural services, as well as renewable energy sources and circular economy.

What remains to be done in the next period is to keep the pace with European efforts for creation of sustainable food production systems, implementation of which is a true challenge at European and at global level, but one thing is certain – creation and maintenance of such food production systems implies full alignment of national policy making with those created at EU level through inclusive and transparent process, that would not only ensure participation of all stakeholders, but will create space for regional cooperation and integration of the Republic of North Macedonia in global innovative processes such as “Digital Villages” or platforms for full transformation and digitalization of the agriculture and rural development sector.

THROUGH  
DIALOGUE

