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The position of aquaculture in EU agricultural promotion policy

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Policy background

The aim of the EU Agricultural Promotion policy¹ is to increase the awareness of the qualities of EU food products and enhance the competitiveness of the Union's agricultural sector. A recent evaluation of the policy found that it has broadly achieved its objectives.² While the evaluation noticed no major inconsistencies with other EU policies, it observed that the promotion policy could be better aligned with political priorities and contribute in particular to the objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy.³

The EU Agricultural Promotion Policy is currently under review.⁴ This assessment aims to enhance its contribution to sustainable production and consumption, in line with evolving diets, while maintaining or even increasing the policy's effectiveness in supporting the agrifood sector's competitiveness.

The basic regulation for the EU Agricultural Promotion policy⁵ establishes that because the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund⁶ already provides support for the promotion of fishery and aquaculture products, the eligibility of these products under the Agricultural Promotion policy should be limited exclusively to campaigns in which fishery and aquaculture products are associated with another agricultural or food product ('basket concept').

The situation of aquaculture and its promotion challenges

Aquaculture is an economic activity with a long tradition in the European Union that is mainly comprised of micro- or small undertakings. Despite the current stagnation of aquaculture production in the European Union, its role in food supply and food security has been recognised, alongside its social and cultural values in many marine and freshwater areas of Europe.

The Farm to Fork strategy dedicates numerous references to the role of aquaculture in the food chain and its transition to sustainable practices that create opportunities for development. This strategy states specifically that farmed fish and seafood generate a lower carbon footprint than land-based animal

¹ Promotion of EU farm products https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/promotion-eu-farm-products_en

² Evaluation of the impact of the EU agricultural promotion policy in internal and third countries' markets {SWD (2020) 401 final} <https://bit.ly/3o43u5o>

³ Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

⁴ EU farm and food products – review of policy on promotion inside and outside the EU. https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12782-EU-farm-and-food-products-review-of-policy-on-promotion-inside-and-outside-the-EU_en

⁵ Regulation (EU) 1144/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on information provision and promotion measures concerning agricultural products implemented in the internal market and in third countries and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 3/2008. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R1144&from=en>

⁶ Regulation (EU) 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0508&from=EN>

production. It should be noted that the challenges of educating consumers on a wide range of production systems makes the promotion of products with the greatest sustainability attributes especially important.

The European Commission has very recently adopted its new EU Strategic Guidelines on Aquaculture (ref. when available). This document aims to stimulate the development of sustainable aquaculture in the European Union and set it back on a growth path that was lost at the end of the last century.

Despite the variety of aquaculture farming systems, diverse production environments, and the many farmed aquatic species, the challenges faced by the European Union's aquaculture industry are essentially common to all, as stated in the European Commission's recently published strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030.⁷ This situation exposes the value of EU-scale communication and promotion actions to raise awareness among consumers, in and outside the EU, of the high standards and high quality of EU aquaculture products, and to increase their competitiveness and the consumption of sustainable products.

Despite the fact that the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) provides support for the promotion of fishery and aquaculture products, this financial aid is only available at the Member State level and not at the European level. This circumstance is attributable to the great majority of EMFF funds being channelled directly to Member States under shared management and only a small amount is retained by the European Commission for direct management at the European level. The same situation will occur under the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) for 2021–2027. Under these circumstances, the European aquaculture industry has no chance to launch broad European-wide communication and promotion campaigns in a coordinated way.

Contributing to Green Deal Objectives

The AAC welcomes the revision of the EU promotion policy for agricultural products, “with a view to enhancing its contribution to sustainable production and consumption, and in line with the shift to a

⁷ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS. Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:bab1f9a7-b30b-11eb-8aca-01aa75ed71a1.0022.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

more plant-based diet.”⁸ The EU promotion policy for agricultural products should contribute to meeting climate and environmental objectives, as well as objectives for animal welfare and public health.

A very high proportion of EU seafood is imported—80% by value, in 2019,⁹ raising questions of global equity as well as sustainability. The agricultural promotion scheme should support products that are leading the way in the transition to higher EU standards.

Recommendations

- 1) Although the EU Agricultural Promotion policy currently supports aquaculture communication and promotion campaigns in and outside the Union, the challenges of European aquaculture require more solid support under this policy. Limiting this support exclusively to campaigns in which aquaculture products are associated with another agricultural or food product ('basket concept') is a handicap. The AAC urges the European Commission to move aquaculture products out of the 'basket' programmes of the EU Agricultural Promotion policy and allow them access to programmes in which aquaculture products can be promoted alone.
- 2) Aquaculture produces food products with very high nutritional value, which aligns with recent trends in healthy European diets. The AAC stresses the importance of making use of the current review of the EU Agricultural Promotion policy to better position the promotion of sustainable aquaculture products.
- 3) Finally, the AAC encourages the European Commission to use the EU Agricultural Promotion policy to support sectors and operators that inherently contribute to, or lead the transition to, achieving the objectives of the Green Deal.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12782-EU-farm-and-food-products-review-of-policy-on-promotion-inside-and-outside-the-EU_en

⁹ EUMOFA, 2020. The EU Fish Market, 2020 edition.



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