

Feedback on EU livestock strategy

Rådet for Grøn Omstilling is a Danish environmental NGO that promotes sustainable solutions in agriculture, energy, transport, and consumption. The organization focuses on policy advocacy and system change to reduce environmental impacts and support a greener transition in Denmark and the EU.

Danish agriculture is heavily based on livestock animal production, like a few other member states, and a number of regions in other member states. Denmark is the country in Europe where the largest part of the land area is used for intensive agriculture. Around 80% of agricultural land is used to grow feed for animals, while we only produce a minor part of the plant food that is consumed in Denmark. Most livestock production takes place on large, industrialised farms, which are favoured under the current EU Common Agricultural Policy. This creates an inefficient use of land from a food security and sustainability perspective, while reinforcing dependence on industrial animal production systems.

At the same time, the water quality has deteriorated significantly. Intensive livestock production is a key driver of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution. This has contributed to severe ecological degradation in Danish coastal waters, particularly in fjords where oxygen depletion has led to the collapse of fish populations and marine ecosystems. In particular, Danish fjords have lost most of their fish populations. Denmark will not be able to fulfill the demands of the Water Framework Directive by 2027.

Until now, the efforts to improve the aquatic environment have largely been based on voluntary agreements, which have proven ineffective to address systemic overproduction of livestock and associated nutrient emissions.

A more structural approach is required, addressing total livestock numbers and land use rather than only production efficiency at the farm level.

Today, Denmark has one of the lowest relative shares of protected nature in Europe. Intensive livestock agriculture has contributed to habitat fragmentation and biodiversity decline. Fortunately, the adoption of the Danish Tripartite Agreement is expected to reduce agricultural land use by 15%. This will make space for more forests and nature areas.

A reduction of agricultural land should also lead to a corresponding reduction in the number of livestock animals and must therefore not be compensated for by an increased import of feed, including soya beans. Therefore, the EU must accept member states like Denmark to restrict feed imports.

This should also be accompanied by stronger animal welfare regulations, which will require more space for the animals - especially pigs and poultry. This can be achieved by using existing facilities for a smaller number of animals.

Our recommendations for the EU Livestock Strategy are to:

1. Rebalance EU agricultural subsidies

The Common Agricultural Policy should be reformed to support organic agriculture and other extensive, low-impact farming systems and phase-out incentives for industrial livestock production.

2. Reduce dependency on imported feed

The EU should support a transition away from feed systems based on imported soy-

based and ensure that reductions in livestock production are not offset by increased imports.

3. Strengthen animal welfare standards

Higher welfare requirements, such as more space per animal and reduced stocking densities. At the same time member states should still have the right to have even stronger demands. Together, this can contribute to a natural reduction in livestock numbers while improving living conditions for animals, particularly in pig and poultry production.

4. Support sustainable land use transformation

Agricultural land freed through livestock reduction should be prioritised for rewilding, forest expansion, wetlands restoration, and other nature-based solutions, while also prioritising sustainable local production of plant-based products for human consumption.