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At a glance:

BELGIUM'S (FLANDERS) CAP STRATEGIC PLAN



CAP Strategic Plans support the transition towards a smart, sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified agricultural sector, ensuring long-term food security. They also contribute to climate action, the protection of natural resources and the preservation/enhancement of biodiversity, as well as strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.

CAP Plans support a wide range of interventions, addressing the specific needs of Member States and their territories. Designed in line with a new result- and performance-oriented approach, they aim to deliver tangible results in relation to EU-level CAP specific objectives, while contributing to the European Green Deal.

For the first time, each CAP Plan defines a strategy covering all the main CAP funded instruments: direct payments, support for rural development and interventions specific to certain market sectors.

The needs of rural areas are also addressed by other EU instruments such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) or the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

The impacts of both the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the extreme weather conditions caused by climate change, highlight the integral link between food security and the need of transition to sustainable and resilient food systems. In this context, the CAP Strategic Plans offer opportunities: e.g. to reduce dependence on synthetic fertilisers and scale up production of renewable energy without undermining food production; and to transform the sectors' capacity in line with more sustainable production methods.

Belgium (Flanders) submitted its first proposal for a CAP Strategic Plan on 11 March 2022, after consultation of stakeholders. On 18 November 2022, Belgium (Flanders) submitted a revised proposal, addressing the Commission's observations on the first draft. The Commission approved this proposal on 5 December 2022. Belgium (Flanders) requested the first amendment of their Plan, which was approved by the Commission on 21 December 2023. The Commission approved the subsequent Flemish amendment request on 19 August 2024 and adopted the third amendment to the Flemish CAP Strategic plan on 12 December 2024. This document presents some of the main features of the CAP Strategic Plan of Belgium (Flanders).

1. DID YOU KNOW?



Flanders is very densely populated with 492 inhabitants per km². **About 46 000 people work in Flemish agriculture**, which contributes to around 0.9% of the region's gross value added. Flemish agri-businesses are mainly managed as family holdings with about 70% of workers being family members, not counting seasonal workers. At the same time, around 90% of agricultural production takes place on specialised farms.

- There are around **23 000 farms in Flanders**, with an average decrease of 2% annually. Farms have an average size of 27 hectares.
- The agricultural population is ageing, with more than 66% of farmers aged 55 or older and less than 6% under 35.
- Flanders hosts many farm animals: **almost 1.3 million cattle, around 5.7 million pigs and more than 42 million poultry.**



2. GOALS AND STRATEGY OF THE CAP STRATEGIC PLAN OF BELGIUM (FLANDERS)

The Plan aims to support farmers in their search for sustainable opportunities for their businesses and gives them opportunities to invest, innovate and develop resilient and future-oriented farming income models. Income security, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change adaptation, improving water quantity and quality, and productive and resilient soils are the main objectives of the Plan.

2.1 AN ECONOMICALLY SUSTAINABLE AND FAIRER CAP

The average farmers' income in Flanders is about 22% below the average of other sectors. Therefore, **income support and security** are a key priority of the CAP Plan. The support also focuses on farmers whose main source of income is agriculture (active farmers). To make the **distribution of financial support fairer**, farmers receive higher support for their first 30 hectares.

Furthermore, Flanders dedicates specific support to certain groups, such as **young farmers, farmers who make additional efforts for the environment and climate** and the **suckler cow sector** (suckler cows are kept for producing high-quality meat). Support for the latter is only provided to farmers who combine sustainable production with local protein supply and long-term grassland management.

Flanders also attaches great importance to **investment support**. Farmers can receive funding for different kinds of investments with an aim of making their holdings more sustainable and more resilient to market shocks, such as investments directly related to agricultural production or processing and the sale of farming products.

The Plan also provides support to the **fruit and vegetable sector** that is channelled through recognised producer organisations, as well as **to the apiculture sector** (beekeeping).

- *Every farmer receives an extra support of EUR 52 for the first 30 hectares of land which leads to a more equal distribution of direct payments between farmers.*
- *Flanders aims to support more than 35% of the farmers with investment support to restructure and modernise their farms. This means that more than 8 200 farmers receive investment support in Flanders.*

2.2 A GREENER CAP

Flanders is facing major **environmental challenges** due to its highly intensive agricultural model and intensive use of external resources, such as fertilisers.

The Plan takes measures to address these challenges. In this respect, in addition to the good agricultural and

environmental conditions, which all farmers have to respect (for example not using pesticides and fertilisers along watercourses), the Plan also offers a large set of voluntary tools. For example, 25% of the direct payments budget is reserved for support to farmers who voluntarily go beyond the mandatory practices in terms of climate and environment (eco-schemes).



Farmers can choose **annual or multiannual commitments to support environment and biodiversity**. Such commitments cover a wide range of activities, such as preserving multiannual grassland, establishing flower strips, fighting unwanted weeds mechanically, maintaining small landscape features such as hedges, or changing to and maintaining of **organic farming**. In terms

of the latter, Flanders aims to increase the area under organic farming to more than 31 000 hectares. Some commitments are **innovative**, supporting farmers in becoming more data-driven or giving cattle a specific diet that makes them emit less greenhouse gases.

Flanders also uses **investment support** to make the CAP greener. This support is intended to help farmers produce more sustainably, for example by saving and producing renewable energy or buying necessary machines. Farmers can receive support to invest in nature on their farm, such as planting hedges, building ponds or setting up agroforestry systems.



- *EUR 185 million, more than half of the Plan's rural development budget, is targeted at environmental and climate-related objectives, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing soil and water quality and strengthening biodiversity.*
- *The eco-scheme for buffer strips amounts to more than EUR 35 million. The buffer strips help to avoid leaching of nutrients and serve as biotopes for fauna and flora.*



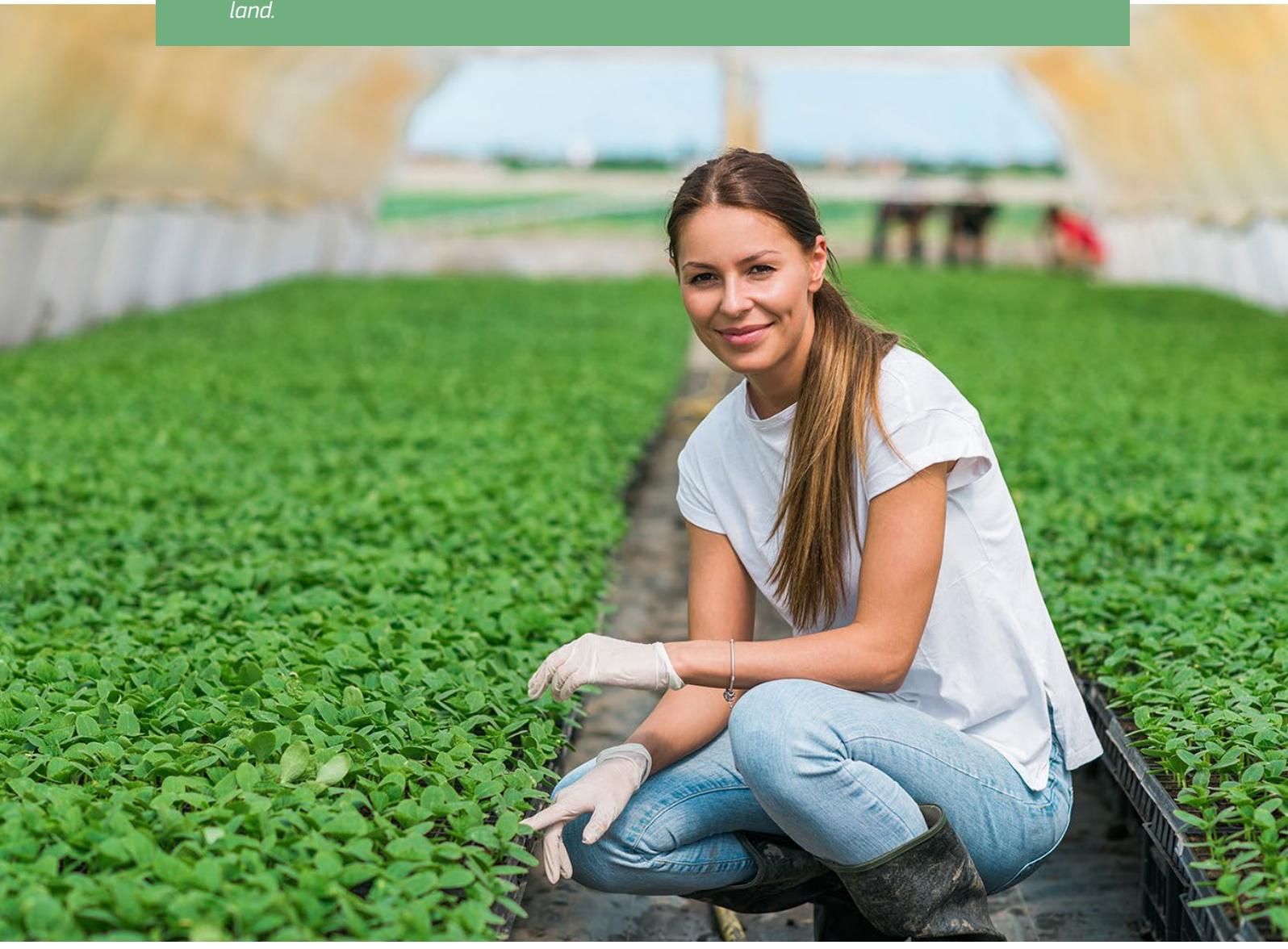
2.3 SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE CAP

The CAP Plan aims at **supporting local activities initiated by rural communities themselves**, young farmers and responding to societal demands on animal welfare.

14 Local Action Groups will receive a total EU funding of more than EUR 25 million in the framework of LEADER, which brings together public, private and civil society stakeholders in a particular area to find shared solutions to its challenges. In Flanders, more than 80% of the rural population is covered by this approach and **more than 1 700 jobs will be created**.

Encouraging younger generations to take up agricultural activities is a big challenge in Flanders. The Plan addresses this with additional income support, setting-up support and a higher support rate for certain investments for young farmers. Flanders aims to help **1 665 young farmers to set up with support from the CAP**. Moreover, there is support dedicated to switching to a more future-oriented and sustainable business strategy. This can include social aspects, such as diversifying to farm tourism and direct sale on the farm.

- *Flanders allocated more than EUR 49 million to young farmers, about 40% more than the minimum legal requirement.*
- *Young farmers receive an additional income support of around EUR 230 per hectare of land.*



3. KNOWLEDGE SHARING, INNOVATION AND DIGITALISATION

Sharing knowledge, supporting innovation and fostering data-driven farming are important matters to future-proof Flemish farming. In order to accommodate this, the Flemish Plan offers farmers the opportunity to participate in a wide range of **field demonstrations and trainings** based on two different approaches. On one hand, Flanders directly supports training centres that have an offer on certain predetermined subjects. On the other hand, farmers can also receive support to follow a specific training on a chosen subject. In that way, Flanders decides which courses the training centres offer while also giving farmers the freedom to choose what they are interested in. Farmers can also visit projects where they learn how results of scientific research can be applied in practice.

Support for **innovative cooperation projects** amounts to over EUR 18 million. In these projects farmers can cooperate with different kinds of actors, such as scientists or advisors, even from abroad, to find innovative solutions like a cooperation on growing non-conventional crops or developing an approach that balances supply and demand of biomass.

Flanders supports farmers in **digitalising** their farm management, for instance through training and advice, demonstration projects and investment support. Moreover, there are expected synergies with projects using other funding sources, such as the Horizon Europe research and innovation framework.

- *The Flemish CAP Plan supports investments directly linked to precision farming, such as drones and sensors, to reduce the use of fertilisers and pesticides by applying them in a more targeted way.*
- *Flanders aims to support 100 innovative cooperation projects.*





4. FINANCIAL ANNEX

	EU budget (€)	National funding (€)	Total (€)
Direct payments	1 045 604 265	n/a	1 045 604 265
Sectoral support	388 486 346	986 346	389 472 692
Rural development	339 724 970	271 172 301	610 897 271
Total	1 773 815 581	272 158 647	2 045 974 228

National funding does not include additional national financing referred to in Article 146 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. Direct Payments include allocations for cotton set out in Annex VIII of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 and reflect possible transfers between pillars. Payments for support under Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 are not included in the CSP. National funding for sectoral support only relates to apiculture. Rural Development reflects possible transfers between pillars and includes technical assistance.

EU FUNDING RESERVED FOR	In EUR	%
Environmental and climate objectives under rural development	184 811 616	54%¹
Eco-schemes under direct payments	261 401 185	25%²
LEADER	25 579 700	8%¹
Complementary redistributive income support	105 115 530	10%²
Young farmers (generational renewal)	57 810 273	n/a³

The minimum financial allocations for support for young farmers can be reserved either under Direct Payments and/or Rural Development. Eco-schemes under Direct Payments may be lower than 25% if the possibility to use the rebate mechanism from Rural Development is used, in line with Article 97 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. The Complementary redistributive income support under Direct Payments may be lower than 10%, in line with Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115

¹ as compared to the rural development allocations set out in Annex XI of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115

² as compared to the direct payments allocations set out in Annex IX of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115

³ not applicable as the minimum contribution to young farmers is set as absolute amounts in Annex XII of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115

More financial information can be found in section 6 and in Annex V of Belgium's (Flanders) CAP Strategic Plan.

