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Achieving food system resilience as part of the EU's recovery plans



People queuing outside a supermarket in Dusseldorf, Germany, during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 crisis is bringing new elements to the discussions around the future EU multiannual financial framework – and the negotiations need to reflect the urgency of the crisis.

A swift response to the economic fallout caused by COVID-19 is needed, to cushion the impact on those most vulnerable in society and stem growing inequalities.

MFF 2021-27

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budget for 2021-2027 is seen as a

pass [five sustainability tests](#) to address the fundamental challenges faced by our society and the environment.

The discussion on sustainability and resilience of agri-food systems takes on renewed significance in this context.

The sufficient supply and safety of food have become an immediate concern to EU citizens with the outbreak of the coronavirus, and there has been a growing recognition of the additional vulnerabilities of globalised food supply chains. The fragility of the EU's food system was already evident in the face of environmental uncertainties and future economic shocks.

What could have been done to better prepare for such disruptions and what can we learn from the current situation? These are crucial questions for research and innovation, in order to develop sustainable global food systems that are more resilient for the future.

In the context of the MFF negotiations and Europe's recovery plan, it is essential that sufficient research and innovation funding is allocated to agriculture and food – not just for Europe's benefit, but also to support the R&I developments in developing countries that have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

Horizon Europe, the EU's framework research programme for research, can play a crucial role in achieving systemic change. With a headline budget of €100 billion, it was set out to be the EU's most ambitious R&I programme ([EC proposal, 2018](#)). The original Horizon Europe proposal saw €10 billion allocated to the food and natural resources cluster. The figure marked a significant increase compared to the previous programme (3.8bn EUR in Horizon 2020). This promising development should not be abridged, as it provides the gateway for urgently needed systemic solutions.

Future disruptions cannot be foreseen in a predictable way. Our only shot at real food security, in the long run, is to place a holistic resilience approach at the heart of the EU's Research and Innovation agenda.

This makes traditional tools of improving food security and nutrition – often sectoral, narrow in scope,

key tool to overcome the severe recession that the COVID-19 crisis will cause in Europe. To navigate through the recovery, concrete innovative financial instruments and an increased overall budget are on the table.

The [budget discussions to date have not gone smoothly](#). In the last steps of the negotiation, the Finnish Council presidency proposed figures on the overall budget well below the [initial Commission proposal](#) (1.07% compared to 1.114% of the EU's GNI), as a compromise due to a disagreement between country blocks of net-contributors and net-receivers.

The last effort, a [special meeting in February](#) that aimed to settle the negotiations in accordance with the deadlines, ended without an agreement. Next to the amount of the overall budget, funding priorities were disputed between new priorities (such as increased research funding), and the "traditional" policy areas of cohesion and agricultural funding.

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programme in innovation for a more sustainable EU agriculture and food system and that sufficient

resources are focused in this important area. In this context, we facilitate a multi-stakeholder platform, defining research gaps which need to be addressed to accelerate a transition. More information to follow soon [on our website](#).

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