



Press Release
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How sustainable is the use of water in EU agriculture, ask auditors

Farmers being major consumers of freshwater, the European Court of Auditors is assessing the impact of the EU's agricultural policy on sustainable water use. The audit, which has just started, will be useful as the EU moves forward with its reform of the common agricultural policy.

Freshwater is one of our most valuable resources. However, the dual pressures of economic activity and climate change are making water increasingly scarce throughout Europe. Agriculture in particular has a major impact. At least one quarter of all freshwater abstracted in the EU is used on farmland. Agricultural activity not only affects the quantity and availability of freshwater resources, but it also affects water quality, for instance through fertiliser and pesticide pollution.

"Farmers are major users of freshwater; they are also amongst the first to be impacted by water scarcity", said Joëlle Elvinger, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the audit. "Our audit seeks to determine in particular whether the action of the EU and its Member States in agriculture is suitable and effective in applying and enforcing the principles of sustainable management of this vital resource."

The EU's current approach to managing water goes back to the 2000 Water Framework Directive, which introduced, among other things, principles of sustainable water use. It aims to prevent the deterioration of water bodies and achieve good qualitative and quantitative status for all water bodies across the EU.

The common agricultural policy (CAP) plays an important role in water sustainability. It offers some tools that can help reduce the pressures on water resources, but it may also, for example, finance irrigation infrastructure.

This audit of the impact of the EU's agricultural policy on the sustainable use of water is being launched with a view to contributing to the future CAP.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' audit preview. The full preview is available at eca.europa.eu in English.

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The auditors will assess whether EU policies promote sustainable water use in agriculture. In particular, they will examine whether:

- o the European Commission has included the principles of sustainable water use in the CAP rules;
- o EU Member States apply those principles and provide incentives for sustainable water use in agriculture.

Note to editors

Three weeks ago, the European Commission decided not to revise the Water Framework Directive, which requires Member States to ensure that all water bodies are in “good status” by 2027.

The audit preview published today provides information about an ongoing audit task on the sustainable use of water in EU agriculture, which is expected to be concluded in the second half of 2021. Audit previews are based on preparatory work undertaken before the start of an audit and should not be regarded as audit observations, conclusions or recommendations. The full audit preview is available in English on eca.europa.eu.

In recent years, the ECA has published several special reports on water-related issues, such as [desertification](#), the [Drinking Water Directive](#), [eutrophication in the Baltic Sea](#) and [water quality in the Danube river basin](#).

Information on the measures the ECA has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found [here](#).

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