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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 23 November 2026: Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan – Presidency report *- Information from the Presidency*

On 7 July 2026, the European Commission presented its Communication for an EU strategy on livestock (11376/26) ("*EU Livestock Strategy*") and its Action Plan for the resilience, strategic autonomy and sustainability of the EU protein system (11410/26) ("*Protein Action Plan*"). Their publication coincided with the commencement of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, and linked well with the Irish Presidency's focus on sustainable livestock as one of its priorities in the agriculture area.

The Irish Presidency held a series of discussions on the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan, offering Member States the opportunity to share their perspectives and outline their priorities in respect of the two documents.

The Commission presented the two initiatives to the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 13 July 2026. At this meeting, Member States provided their initial views on the complementarity of the EU Livestock Strategy and the Protein Action Plan, as well as the actions they considered most appropriate to ensure alignment and coherence in their implementation.

At their informal meeting in Dublin on 9 September 2026, agriculture ministers discussed the two documents in more detail, with a focus on the role of research and innovation. The Commission initiatives were also on the agenda of the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) meetings on 6 July 2026 and on 21 September 2026, where discussions centred on the competitiveness and sustainability of the EU livestock and protein sectors. Finally, agriculture attachés assessed the two documents from an animal health and welfare perspective at a meeting on 25 September 2026.

These targeted political discussions represent an important contribution to the direction of travel for policies on EU livestock and wider protein systems into the future. The Irish Presidency has prepared this report based on those discussions, and the report was discussed the SCA on 9 November and brought to the attention of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council.

Overall Assessment

Member States welcomed the publication of both the EU Livestock Strategy and EU Protein Action Plan, which they agreed were timely and necessary given the challenges and opportunities facing the livestock and protein sectors. Member States broadly agreed with the Commission that both initiatives should be seen as complementary, and as addressing the shared challenges of guaranteeing food security, while promoting competitiveness and sustainability.

The majority of Member States considers that livestock farming is of key importance to European agriculture, and that the Union must continue to support farmers and the wider livestock sector, as the sector makes a vital contribution to the food security of EU citizens and of citizens around the world. Member States also raised the wider social and economic role of livestock farming in supporting vibrant rural communities, maintaining and preserving landscapes, supplying renewable energies, supporting tourism, and providing ecological and biodiversity services. For many regions across the EU, livestock farming is also the foundation of local traditions and social identity. Accordingly, Member States welcomed the emphasis the Commission has placed on territoriality within the Strategy.

The Protein Action Plan sets out a target to increase the share of protein from oilseeds and protein crops originating from the EU and used as feed in the EU, from 25.8% in 2025, to 35% in 2035. Many Member States agreed that this was an important target for the EU that would help to address challenges including environmental pressures; the EU's dependence on imported animal feed, and competitiveness. Some Member States suggested that the EU should be even more ambitious in its targets, although they advised that the approach should avoid mandatory national targets.

Both the EU Livestock Strategy and the Protein Action Plan highlight the Commission's ambition to support farming practices that contribute positively to nature management, biodiversity and conservation. As examples, the Commission cites practices including extensive grazing, optimised feeding strategies and organic farming. Member States welcomed this sustainability ambition, with some noting that the diversity of farming methods across the EU is also a strategic asset, and that different practices may suit different geographical areas better than others. Indeed, the EU Livestock Strategy also mentions that there should be an emphasis on territorial solutions that are adapted to different production systems and regions.

Member States' positions converged in their assessments on the need for simplification and reducing the administrative burden on farmers. They stressed that the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan should emphasise the importance of making it easier for farmers and primary producers to farm sustainably and for authorities to implement policy actions. Member States considered simplification an essential component of competitiveness, and that efforts towards higher environmental performance should be accompanied by simplified processes.

Research and Innovation

At their informal meeting in Dublin in September, agriculture ministers toured agricultural research facilities in the area of sustainable livestock and saw firsthand how those innovations are being put into practice across Irish farms. This theme was also at the centre of the informal debate in Dublin Castle.

Member States shared their views on ***how research and innovation could be leveraged to support the EU livestock and protein sectors across the three dimensions of sustainability, namely economic, social and environmental***.

Member States also discussed ***how the EU and Member States could best support farmers, particularly smaller farmers, to adopt new technologies and innovative practices***.

Member States were of the view that expanding the EU's agricultural research and innovation outputs would positively impact all three dimensions of sustainability.

In terms of economic benefits, Member States spoke about how research and innovation in the livestock sector could improve productivity and increase efficiency. For example, genomics research has paved the way for greater milk and beef yields. Recent breakthroughs in animal breeding have also shown the benefits of breeding animals for their resilience and health. Efficiency savings could be made through precision feeding methods, and on-farm robotics. Breakthroughs in animal health research, for examples in vaccines and biosecurity, contributed hugely to the economic sustainability of livestock farmers. In the protein sector, plant breeding and new genomic techniques were called out as exciting avenues of research and innovation that would improve the economic viability of protein crops, something also highlighted in the Commission's Protein Action Plan.

From a social perspective, Member States consistently highlighted the importance of social networks, farm advisory services and other knowledge sharing programmes, for example the EU CAP Network. These allow for developments in research and innovation to reach farmers, and for the latest learnings to be brought into practice. Training and education of farmers in the use of the latest technologies was also cited as crucial for leveraging sustainability in the livestock and protein sectors. Younger farmers were identified as key actors in the uptake of innovative practices, and Member States acknowledged that supports for generational renewal and improvements in research and innovation often go hand in hand. The improvements that research and innovation can bring to animal health and welfare was cited as having an important social dimension too. Member States also called for the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan to be implemented in tandem with other related strategies, including the Generational Renewal Strategy and the forthcoming Rural Action Plan.

Research and innovation must also be an integral part of efforts to improve environmental sustainability in the livestock and plant protein sectors. Member States pointed to existing innovative solutions for water irrigation and water storage, and made the case that farmers needed to rely more heavily on these solutions into the future when droughts would become more commonplace. Furthermore, Member States supported further research into the circular economy and how animal by-products could best be valorised, thus generating dual benefits for the environment and for farmers' incomes. They also felt that there was great potential in the leveraging of animal by-products and plant biomass for renewable energies, thereby demonstrating the positive role that farming could play in building a sustainable future.

When considering how the EU and Member States could support smaller famers to adopt new technologies, many Member States referred to the need for farmers to have access to investment support. This relates to the Commission's theme of resilience and the need to support farmers to withstand crises by strengthening risk management frameworks. In Member States' view, the investment capacity of small farmers could not always meet the upfront costs of new technologies, and without public financial supports, many could be left behind. The role of cooperatives and producer organisations in combining resources to purchase technologies and tools was also highlighted by some Member States. Furthermore, many Member States agreed that simplified rules and standards, and the removal of bureaucratic burdens for farmers engaging with research and innovation, would be of greatest benefit to small farmers who feel that burden the most. Once again, Member States spoke about how knowledge sharing mechanisms help to bring research findings from laboratories and boardrooms onto farms, which was particularly important for smaller farm holdings which are far from learning centres.

Competitiveness

The Special Committee on Agriculture held an exchange of views on the Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan on 21 September 2026. Member States considered the following questions asked by the Irish Presidency:

- **How could EU policies be strengthened to support farmers to make long-term investments in order to strengthen competitiveness?**

- **How can livestock and protein production systems become more sustainable and resilient to climate change? Could you share concrete examples from your Member State?**

The majority of Member States underlined the importance of a stable and predictable policy framework that is supported by a sufficiently funded CAP. Without such a framework, Member States cautioned that farmers would be slow to make long-term investments to improve the competitiveness of their farms. Member States expressed their interest in hearing more from the Commission about how the policy pathways set out in the Livestock Strategy and Protein Plan could be funded.

Some Member States referred to the upcoming review of the Unfair Trading Practices Regulation, and the importance of acknowledging and paying for the work carried out by farmers beyond the provision of food – including land management and biodiversity services. Robust risk management tools, which could include subsidised insurance or mutual funds, were mentioned by some Member States in their interventions as important elements in building resilience and facilitating greater competitiveness.

While several Member States welcomed the focus placed by the Commission on animal health and welfare standards, some expressed the view that introducing higher animal health and welfare requirements should be accompanied by impact assessments and transition periods, as well as a commitment to ensuring reciprocity of standards in respect of third-country imports.

Greater and simpler access to funding – through CAP or other EU financial instruments as well as from the private sector – was identified by Member States as important to improving competitiveness. Several Member States spoke about introducing targeted and distinct funding for the sectors deemed most in need, which could include some types of livestock farming and the protein crop sector.

Member States spoke about the need for human resources to ensure that livestock farming can remain competitive into the future. This would mean support for farm partnerships, and training and education programmes for farmers, veterinarians and other professionals, which could include start-up assistance for young farmers in the livestock and protein crop sectors. This is touched upon in the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan, where the Commission states that young farmers are often at the forefront of adopting new technologies, sustainable practices and diversified business models.

In answer to the second question, Member States focused on examples of adaptations to climate change and on methods to reduce the impact of farming on our climate. A common thread running through the interventions was the idea that developments in sustainability should not be at the expense of the farmer and should instead coexist alongside economic gains.

A warming planet brings with it new risks from pathogens and diseases, and so many Member States underlined the importance of strengthening the EU's biosecurity and health surveillance technologies. Alongside this, Member States mentioned the need for greater vaccine development and availability. Animal and plant breeding for resistance to disease, and tolerance of heat and drought, were other ways raised by Member States to build sustainability and resilience in the agricultural sectors. Some Member States again highlighted their interest in promoting new genomic techniques and other modern plant breeding technologies. Indeed, some of the concrete examples from Member States included centres for crop breeding that bring together academia, society and industry to build expertise in plant breeding.

Some Member States spoke about the need for the EU to take on board the best available techniques to reduce agricultural emissions, while underlining that this should be based on objective data. On-farm tools that give farmers the knowledge and power to understand the climate impacts at farm level were cited as a helpful tool for improving environmental sustainability. Other Member States spoke about the importance of precision feeding, ration optimisation and feed additives to reduce emissions.

Extensive farming was mentioned by some Member States as a practice that could help mitigate the effects of climate change by preventing wildfires, and some Member States also requested continued and increased support for pasture-based grazing.

Many Member States supported introducing greater coverage of protein crops and legumes as a means to improve soil health, to assist with nitrogen fixing and to reduce fertiliser needs. However, as these crops are more sensitive to irrigation and drought, some suggested that farmers should be supported financially when choosing to grow these crops. Another concrete example of a success story in the EU was the expansion of protein isolate production facilities, which increase the added value of protein crops and assist the EU in the transition towards more sustainable food systems.

Animal Health and Welfare

Agriculture attachés met on 25 September for an exchange of views on the animal health and welfare aspects of the two communications. All Member States agreed that animal health and welfare were important elements to prioritise in the context of the future development of EU agriculture.

Two questions were posed to the attachés in order to facilitate a targeted discussion:

- **What are Member States' views on how EU policies could support farmers to make long term investments in order to strengthen animal health and welfare?**

- **What are Member States' views on the role of animal health and welfare in building a climate-resilient livestock sector?**

The majority of Member States emphasised that predictable and stable legal frameworks for animal health and welfare standards would be important to secure investment and ensure competitiveness. Some Member States specifically called for a reliable and transparent roadmap of the Commission's legislative plans. Some Member States highlighted that transition periods were important to help farmers and industry to transition to updated welfare standards, and a cohort also went further and requested that financial assistance should be made available to help with that transition. A general note of caution was expressed regarding the need to provide for adequate impact assessments of new legislation, in addition to appropriate transition periods that would avoid new investments in facilities being superseded by updated legislative requirements.

Certain Member States were of the view that there should be better recognition for the environmental services that sustainable livestock systems deliver, and that compensation for higher animal welfare standards should be considered. On this point, some Member States suggested that animal health and welfare should be seen as a public good, in the sense that costs could not entirely rest on the shoulders of farmers.

Several Member States spoke about ensuring a level playing-field for farmers in the EU and those in third countries, particularly on welfare matters. The principle of reciprocity in trade agreements as mentioned in the Commission's strategy was explicitly welcomed by some Member States, although some Member States reiterated that the EU should maintain trade relations and reduce trade barriers with reliable partners.

On the second question, the issue of biosecurity was consistently highlighted by Member States as a priority when building a climate-resilient livestock sector. Certain Member States suggested that there should be uniform standards for disease prevention, while others suggested that there is a need to strengthen the monitoring of disease vectors. Some Member States asked the Commission to update the categorisation of certain diseases to reflect the change in outbreaks over the last few years. Many Member States suggested that vaccine development be accompanied by funding in light of the increased disease risks from climate change.

The majority of Member States pointed towards the connected issues of temperature, water and energy when developing housing facilities for animals. On this, several Member States pointed towards animal-friendly farming systems - including extensive grazing - as benefitting animal welfare whilst requiring less feed and water inputs.

Member States viewed positively the breakthroughs in animal breeding practices - where animals are bred for their resilience to high temperatures or diseases - as well as innovations in feed and nutrition. These improvements could benefit animal health and welfare, while improving the environmental footprint of farms and their economic viability.

Some Member States suggested that research and development for plant proteins should be prioritised, and others mentioned that climate-resilient feed crops that are domestically produced could strengthen resilience and reduce dependencies.

Finally, many Member States reiterated the importance of reducing the administrative burden for farmers, and felt that the provision of supports, including knowledge transfer processes, advisory systems, and risk management tools, should be prioritised.

Summary

The discussions chaired by the Irish Presidency on the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan brought out a number of key themes.

One was the importance of practical actions to support farmers. Member States consistently emphasised that policies should be easily translated into on-farm actions, and that bridging links - whether through farm advisory services, networks, or otherwise - were key to implementation.

A second theme was the importance of coherence and complementarity across the EU's different policies in the field of agriculture. On this point, most Member States saw the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan as striving to achieve the same goals: food security, farmers' prosperity and environmental sustainability.

A third theme was the support for a coherent and multi-dimensional policy framework that can improve competitiveness, sustainability, animal health and welfare, and resilience. This was exemplified by actions in areas such as animal genetics and plant breeding, where farmers could benefit from increased productivity, while animals and plants can become more resilient.

Across the board, the Irish Presidency assesses that there is common understanding amongst Member States on the priorities and objectives of the EU Livestock Strategy and Protein Action Plan.