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Policy Paper

Where is the Italian agriculture heading? A discussion in light of the prospects for the future CAP

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Abstract. In early 2025, the European Union launched a new phase of dialogue on the future of agricultural and food policies, aiming to move beyond the sustainability-centred narratives of the Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy. The initiative, grounded in the “Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture” and the Commission’s communication “A Vision for Agriculture and Food,” reframes the role of agriculture within a broader geopolitical and socio-economic context. The Italian Council for Agricultural Research and Analysis of the Agricultural Economy and the Italian Association of Agricultural and Applied Economics convened a study day to examine the relevance and the implications of the EU’s Vision for Italy. This paper presents a synthesis of the discussions and reflections, structured along four thematic pillars: economic, environmental, social, and institutional sustainability. The analysis highlights the structural weaknesses of Italian agriculture, the need for circular and diversified agricultural systems, the integration of agroecological and climate resilience strategies with competitiveness, the need for generational and social renewal, and the necessity for political reflection on the adequacy of the Italian agricultural policy governance system. By capturing the perspectives of researchers and academics, the paper contributes to the national debate on reshaping EU agricultural policy beyond 2027.

Keywords: Italian agriculture, CAP reform, sustainability, multiannual financial framework.

JEL codes: Q01, Q18.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between the end of last year and the beginning of 2025, the European Union launched a new phase of debate around the future of policies for the agricultural and agrifood sectors. This latest phase aims to carry the strongly sustainability-focused approach - which had inspired the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy - into a different perspective, in which the sectoral challenges are placed in a drastically changed global context and pursue the ambition of making the agricultural sector more attractive and responsive to the expectations of stakeholders.

The guidelines and recommendations for this new phase were outlined in the “*Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture*”, a document resulting from a working group comprising approximately 30 European stakeholders from the agri-food sector, civil society, rural communities, and academia. The requests that emerged were taken up by the EU Commission with the publication of a strategic document, “*A Vision for Agriculture and Food. Shaping together an attractive farming and agri-food sector for future generations*”, which placed the issue of agricultural policy renewal within a more ambitious agenda for food and the future of rural areas. A renewal program, based on further in-depth papers related to many unresolved issues, will be introduced in the coming months of 2025, with new emerging themes added.

The strategic vision document closes with an exhortation from the EU Commission, which “...invites the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the social partners and all stakeholders to actively contribute to the development and delivery of the initiatives in this Communication.”. CREA – Research Centre for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy and AIEAA (Associazione Italiana di Economia Agraria e Applicata) jointly took up this idea and organised a study day, which took place in Rome on 3rd April 2025. More than twenty researchers, both academic and non-academic, experts in the various topics at the centre of the recent documents, actively participated in the event.

The work began with two general overview speeches: the first provided an in-depth analysis of the specificities of the Italian production system, drawing on the detailed sectoral analysis carried out by CREA PB in its Yearbook of Italian Agriculture (CREA, 2024); the second offered a reasoned summary of the contents of the EU Strategic Vision document. Then, the discussion was organised into four thematic tables, each focused on a dimension of sustainability — economic, environmental,

social, and institutional — with as many coordinators as needed to guide the participants through a structured discussion on the issues of most significant relevance to Italy’s national context.

The results and reflections arising from the debate are briefly reported in the following Sections, which represent a first contribution to the internal discussion on the future of agricultural and food policies, by a component of the Italian research world.

2. THE CAP POST-2027 IN THE VISION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

On February 19, 2025, the European Commission presented the Communication “*A Vision for Agriculture and Food*,” outlining a roadmap to 2040 that ensures future policies align with this Vision (European Commission, 2025a). The document sets the direction and outlines principles closely aligned with the recommendations of the *Strategic Dialogue* (2024), while also being strongly influenced by other strategic documents regarding the European Union’s (EU) competitiveness, its repositioning in the changing global geo-economic and geopolitical context, and its capacity to respond to crises (Draghi, 2024; Niinistö, 2024; Letta, 2023; Spain’s National Office of Foresight and Strategy, 2023).

The document was highly anticipated, as it traditionally outlines the Commission’s orientations for the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) at the mid-point of the programming period. This was also the case in 2017, when the Communication (European Commission, 2017) paved the way for the New Delivery Model and CAP National Strategic Plans (NSP). In that document, the CAP was the focus, but agriculture and the broader agri-food system were largely absent from the debate on the future of the EU, except in budgetary issues. In 2025, by contrast, agriculture and food production are at the heart of the EU’s political agenda, as they are considered strategic for maintaining economic and social stability, ensuring food security in times of crisis, and guaranteeing European food sovereignty. The Vision is therefore dedicated to securing their long-term competitiveness and sustainability, with the CAP being just one of several policies contributing to these goals, often not even the most important one.

The document focuses on four fundamental priority areas, which correspond to the three classic pillars of sustainability – economic, environmental, and social (the latter enriched by the food component) – alongside a fourth area focused on the sector’s competitiveness and resilience. Generational renewal and innovation

are cross-cutting themes throughout the Communication, with the former being a long-term priority due to the ageing farming population, and the latter a supporting element to facilitate a sustainable transition. Regarding sustainability, the document emphasises the need to integrate both economic challenges and ensure a socially just transition into the ecological transition, highlighting the importance of circular sustainability. According to this approach, environmental and economic sustainability enable the sector to remain competitive and meet society's expectations regarding food safety, food security, quality, vitality of rural areas, preservation of local cultures and traditions, animal welfare, and other related concerns.

In the priority area dedicated to economic sustainability, the most significant references to the CAP can be found. The document confirms the need to continue providing farmers with income support that should be more targeted and fairer, capable of attracting young and new farmers. Support should be more focused on farmers actively engaged in food production (with priority given to the production of agricultural products essential for the EU's strategic autonomy and resilience), on the economic vitality of farms, and on environmental protection. Furthermore, the document emphasises the need to streamline and simplify payments for ecosystem services, as well as to simplify conditionality by shifting from conditions to incentives, rewarding farmers who exceed mandatory requirements. However, there are not enough details to clarify how all this will impact the green architecture of the current CAP (which is not even mentioned in the document) or the resources required to remunerate farmers. The document also touches on the issue of flexibility – both for farmers, in defining practices best suited to their farms and contexts, and for Member States, in achieving the objectives of the post-2027 CAP.

The second priority area, focused on competitiveness, aims to ensure European food sovereignty by reducing critical dependencies (such as proteins, raw materials, and fertilisers), promoting fairer global competition, avoiding situations where European standards on food safety and sustainability place the EU at a disadvantage and lead to a loss of competitiveness, and strengthening EU's ability to respond to crises.

The priority area dedicated to environmental sustainability outlines the agricultural sector's contribution to the EU's 2040 climate target, considering its specific characteristics and the need to ensure both competitiveness and food security.

In the fourth priority area, focused on social sustainability, the document highlights the need to

strengthen synergies and complementarities between the CAP and other policies, including the Cohesion policy, to provide adequate support and tangible impact in rural areas through integrated planning and implementation efforts. This aspect becomes particularly relevant when considered in light of the Communication on the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (European Commission, 2025b). In that document, the current budget structure, based on spending programs rather than policies, is shown to cause delays in planning and expenditure, as well as overlaps and gaps due to the lack of coordinated strategies for cross-cutting priorities. Therefore, the MFF Communication proposes a country-level plan focused on common priorities, including promoting economic, social, and territorial cohesion, as well as implementing key reforms and investments. Reading the two documents together reveals a desire for greater integration between Rural Development Policy and Cohesion Policy, although the extent of such integration, particularly in terms of policy autonomy, funding, and the role of public administrations, remains to be determined.

The Vision does not propose solutions but provides a broad overview of the transformations agriculture needs, promoting ongoing dialogue among stakeholders, institutions, and civil society, along with a combination of policies and institutional levels. It implicitly calls for the need, without explicitly naming it, for horizontal governance (among institutions at the same level with responsibilities over different policies) and vertical governance (among several institutions with responsibilities over the same policy) (Coderoni, 2023).

3. POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The economic sustainability of the entire Italian agri-food system depends on both macro and micro aspects of the national system, including the structural characterisation of Italian agriculture and the strong trade interconnections within and outside Europe. These aspects depend on the ability to guarantee income, adequately remunerate production factors, ensure competitiveness, and employ workers. Among the various aspects that determine and influence economic sustainability, those relating to the international scenario and risk management are worth closer examination.

The economic sustainability of the entire Italian agri-food system strongly depends on the evolution of the international scenario in two interconnected aspects: one external and one internal to the Italian country sys-

tem.

On the external side, Italian agriculture finds itself in the peculiar situation of being dependent on foreign markets for specific strategic production inputs (such as chemical inputs, soy, etc.). At the same time, the food industry exports high-quality, simple, and processed products, such as those with geographical indications, whose production cannot be outsourced (CREA, 2024). This situation has been achieved thanks to the advantages derived from the European Single Market, as well as a general climate of institutional and market stability, with the world's leading countries considered Italy's commercial partners. It is evident that situations of financial instability - linked to exchange rates -, economic instability - linked to tariffs -, or institutional instability - tied to unclear or no longer perceived as clear market governance rules - lead to repercussions that result in increased production costs, strain on the domestic market, and a decrease in prices and agricultural incomes.

On the internal side, within the Italian country system, the economic variables of the primary sector highlight that the profitability of land and labour has remained almost stable over the last decade, with only slight increases during the post-COVID years. These weak increases are less significant, especially on small-sized farms, due to the tensions recorded on international price markets, confirming that, despite the national production model's backbone being found in small-sized farms, the latter continue to be more vulnerable. The economic sustainability of the agricultural system, therefore, is closely linked to the structural dimension of farm holders' companies. Addressing this challenge also includes promoting generational turnover initiatives. In our country, the process of ageing has not suffered any setbacks in recent years, with a group of entrepreneurs over 60 years of age that largely exceeds that of entrepreneurs under 40 (CREA, 2024).

Considering these structural aspects of the agricultural production system, the organisational and coordination capacity of value chains is becoming increasingly important not only to define production quantities and selling prices, but especially to define quality levels aligned with the global market and to bring in financial and human resources capable of supporting innovation processes and the management of commercial strategies in both domestic and international markets (CREA, 2024). From this perspective, the Italian agri-food system is highly complex, encompassing businesses that vary in terms of ownership, corporate form, and strategy. Cooperative enterprises, family-owned companies, and multinationals compete in national and international markets. These latter companies have acquired all

or part of the corporate structure of many Italian food companies, influencing the behaviour of the value chains they are part of, including their internationalisation strategies.

The economic sustainability of the Italian agri-food system increasingly depends on developing an efficient and modern industrial relations system, capable of providing timely guidance to supply chains and their operators. In this regard, forms of supply chain management related to inter-professional organisations would guarantee a management capacity suitable to face the economic challenges stemming from market instability and those arising from climate change, which, in turn, are embedded in international dynamics.

In a context marked by extreme weather events, market crises, and geopolitical instability, strengthening the resilience of Italian farms has become a priority. Two strategic levers in this direction are diversification and circularity. Diversification involves two main strategies. First, expanding the range of cultivated crops, for example, by introducing legumes or oilseeds such as sunflowers and rapeseed, can help better cope with the effects of climate change. Second, developing alternative sources of income for farmers, such as renewable energy production, agritourism, and direct sales, to help stabilise incomes during periods of market volatility. At the same time, promoting nutrient circularity is essential to reduce farm costs and mitigate the environmental impact of chemical fertilisers. Encouraging the reuse of nitrogen-rich livestock manure, adopting precision agriculture techniques, and integrating agroecological practices into production cycles can enhance farm sustainability and reduce reliance on imported fertilisers. Investing in diversification and circularity means building a more resilient and sustainable agricultural system that cannot only cope with external shocks but also adapt and evolve.

4. POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The environmental dimension of sustainability is, in some respects, the most delicate as it implies negotiation and interaction between several actors (farmers and citizens) in managing different aspects that impact the environment and society itself. Even though the CAP in the past has introduced actions that go in the direction of creating a more environmentally sustainable production model, there are still numerous areas of intervention that include the adoption of more sustainable agricultural practices, the maintenance of high levels of biodi-

versity, the reduction of greenhouse gases, and the maintenance of certain limiting production factors (i.e. water, soil, inputs). The *Vision* document foresees achieving a higher level of environmental sustainability as a function of Science's ability to provide answers and develop interventions in several areas, including technological innovation, the evolution of agricultural production models, the development of supporting infrastructures, and increased consumer awareness.

The ongoing decline in biodiversity and accelerating climate change constitute one of the most pressing environmental challenges facing society. Despite significant financial resources allocated to environmental objectives, the effectiveness of EU agri-environmental and climate schemes in mitigating agriculture's impact on biodiversity remains questionable (Pe'er et al., 2022). In Italy, this situation highlights the need for innovative contractual solutions to improve policy efficiency. Among the most promising approaches are result-based schemes, in which farmers receive payments contingent upon achieving environmental outcomes, and collective approaches, in which groups of farmers commit to shared targets (Targetti et al., 2024). Nevertheless, key considerations include their capacity to attract private investment, the availability of enabling technologies, and the complexity they may entail.

In Italy, the agroecological transition requires a strong commitment from farmers, supported by robust institutional frameworks. Beyond the mere adoption of agroecological practices at farm and food system levels, it is essential to invest in training, advisory services, and knowledge exchange networks (Wezel, 2015). Reinforcing territorial governance mechanisms, such as Bio-Districts, and integrating local knowledge systems are also crucial (Dara Guccione et al., 2024). In light of the water crisis, agroecology presents a pivotal strategy for enhancing climate resilience. Therefore, full integration of agroecology within Italy's CAP NSP, with targeted support for Bio-districts and sustainable resource management, is essential. Despite the great emphasis on agroecology and Bio-districts and their potential contribution to a more sustainable agriculture, it must be admitted that this is a residual system in the Italian agricultural landscape, still far from becoming a reference model for many Italian farmers.

Although agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Italy have declined by 19% since 1990 (CREA, 2024), this reduction is mainly attributable to decreased production levels (Baldoni et al., 2017). Greater ambition in mitigation efforts is therefore required to attain climate neutrality without compromising productivity (Coderoni, 2023). Beyond the CAP, innovative policy

instruments are being considered. The EU Regulation on carbon removals and carbon farming establishes quality criteria for certifying carbon credits generated from agricultural soils and forests, potentially stimulating voluntary carbon markets through private finance. Similarly, the introduction of an agricultural Emission Trading System, although highly questioned (Copa-Cogeca, 2024), could apply the polluter-pays principle within the sector, reducing emissions cost-effectively. In this context, Italy's availability of farm-level GHG estimates from FADN data (Coderoni & Vanino, 2022) could facilitate the identification of mitigation hot spots for targeted interventions, such as those supported by the Agrifood Just Transition Fund.

Soil health, a long-standing concern, has recently regained prominence through the EU's Soil Strategy, particularly via the Soil Deal and Soil Mission, which aims to reverse degradation currently affecting approximately two-thirds of EU soils. In Italy, pressing concerns include soil erosion, depletion of organic matter, biodiversity loss, and nutrient runoff. However, significant obstacles persist, including the dispersion of incentives across CAP measures, structural transformations within the sector, and institutional inadequacies (Winkler et al., 2025).

Dairy livestock farming represents a key sector in the decarbonisation agenda and is undergoing substantial transformation due to evolving consumption patterns and growing demand for sustainable dairy products (Coderoni, 2023). Although climate-smart innovations, such as robotic feeding systems, are enhancing efficiency, challenges remain concerning production standards and reliance on imported feed. Additionally, there is concern regarding the potential redistribution of costs along the supply chain under emerging policy regimes (Huber, 2024).

Agriculture is inherently circular, traditionally reusing by-products such as manure to maintain and enhance soil fertility. Beyond internal recycling, the sector holds significant potential to strengthen circularity through cross-sectoral synergies. Fertiliser use remains a primary environmental concern, accounting for approximately one-third of agriculture's CO₂ emissions and depending heavily on scarce and unevenly distributed natural resources. In response, the EU Regulation 2019/1009, which entered into force in 2022, promotes the use of organic and waste-derived fertilisers as part of a broader strategy to support sustainable agriculture. Nevertheless, adopting such alternatives remains limited, hindered by perceived high costs, concerns regarding potential contaminants, and cultural resistance (Ronzon et al., 2024). Facilitating this transition requires the

development of industrial symbiosis initiatives, supported by policy instruments such as the EU's Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan (Abitabile et al., 2025). Strengthening Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) to enhance information dissemination and farmer skills, alongside improved monitoring through tools such as the Farm Sustainability Data Network (FSDN), is crucial for fostering a more circular and resilient agricultural sector.

5. POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Social sustainability lastly entered the debate on the European Union's agricultural policies. It is encouraging that this issue is now being addressed more concretely. In the *Strategic Dialogue*, seven principles address social sustainability, a significant step forward. Additionally, the *Vision* emphasises the importance of this topic, particularly in the context of generational renewal, which is seen as essential for the vitality of agriculture and rural areas. This is welcome news in Italy, where the issue is particularly acute (Carbone et al., 2024). It is also promising that the focus shifts from young to new entrants. Many young beneficiaries would likely enter farming anyway, while others seek to enter later in life, bringing valuable skills, capital, and networks.

New entrants, regardless of age, face land access issues, especially in densely populated Italy. Therefore, the mention of a European Observatory on Farmland is a positive development. Lack of infrastructure and services also prevents entries; thus, the broader, non-sectoral approach is a welcome development. We now await the *Generational Renewal Strategy*, as promised by 2025.

For Italy, promoting and enhancing social sustainability involves engaging with various aspects of agriculture and the food chain. Knowledge and skills are among the challenges recognised in the *Dialogue* as an opportunity to expand farmers' lifelong learning and revitalise extension services. Moreover, another challenge in the *Vision* document concerns "*Building an attractive sector that ensures a fair standard of living and leverages new income opportunities*". A focus on generational and entrepreneurial renewal should also consider the social diversity of the Italian agricultural system. Farming income contributes to the welfare of diverse entrepreneurs to varying extents. Farmers managing large holdings often belong to the highest income deciles. Small and medium farms, conversely, typically represent only one among several income sources for farming families, rather than being the primary one (Marino et al., 2024). Small and medium-sized activi-

ties still involve a significant number of people. In some rural contexts, they play a relevant social role, providing employment. Their support is likely to generate valuable social outcomes. However, the attractiveness of agriculture for small and medium-sized farms, as well as for young people and new entrants, strongly depends on the rural context in which they operate. More than direct farm income support, these farmers would need measures targeted at promoting farm business diversification, enabling household livelihood strategies based on «pluri-activity», simplifying bureaucracy in farm management, and promoting horizontal cooperation in marketing farm produce.

Social sustainability in Italian agriculture also requires a critical acknowledgement and systematic response to the economic and social inequalities embedded throughout the agri-food supply chain. These disparities disproportionately affect women and migrant labourers and are often neglected or tacitly accepted, despite constituting deep-rooted structural challenges (Zumpano, 2020; Corrado and Zumpano, 2021). Thus far, the CAP has largely overlooked the social dimension, offering only broad, non-binding recommendations concerning gender equality, without establishing enforceable commitments (Zumpano, 2021). In the domain of labour rights, intervention has been limited to sanction-based mechanisms, which have proven insufficient and largely ineffective (Canfora & Leccese, 2022). The analysis of recent EU policy documents reveals little progress on these issues, particularly in terms of proposals. Persisting in this limited approach risks exacerbating rural decline, as individuals increasingly disengage from agricultural work and abandon rural territories. Building on the advances made in the CAP's environmental dimension, there is a need to support methodological frameworks that embed social sustainability into agricultural policy through the implementation of fairness schemes.

Another topic focused on the strategic dialogue is "*Making the healthy and sustainable choice the easy one.*" This topic extends beyond the agricultural sector and encompasses the broader food system, aligning with the European Commission's recommendations (SAPEA, 2023). Appealing to consumers' rationality is not enough.

Different dimensions of the "*food environment*" need to be addressed to promote sustainable consumption. From a systemic perspective, four key aspects are of central importance: nutrition and diet, consumer information, public food procurement and the response to food poverty. Regarding the first aspect, Italy can valorise the heritage value of the Mediterranean diet (Dernini & Capone, 2024). However, it must deal with the decline in adherence and the rise in obesity, which raises the

question of who should lead the change and with what incentives. In terms of information, the main challenge for sustainability labelling is to strike a balance between simplicity and comprehensiveness, considering the various social dimensions of sustainability (ranging from nutritional value to supply chain equity to animal welfare, etc.) (Sanye Mengual et al., 2024). Public procurement of food plays a strategic role in education and market orientation; however, the key issue remains defining effective sustainability criteria, which is the subject of ongoing debate (European Commission, 2024). Italy is widely recognised for its excellence in this area through the CAM (Minimum Environmental Criteria), which integrates environmental, territorial, and social sustainability criteria into public catering tenders. A widely shared call is to strengthen food literacy, meaning navigating a highly complex food environment. Finally, the importance of solidarity networks, such as food banks, is recognised to actively support food systems in addressing emergency food insecurity situations, provided that such networks are supported by appropriate policies (Galli et al., 2018).

However, the role of agriculture and rural areas is often nuanced or neglected (Mazzocchi et al., 2023). The reference to food waste remains rather vague: in the *Vision*, it is mentioned only once, without any specific target, merely as a general commitment to continue existing initiatives. This is problematic because the commercial dynamics that drive food waste behaviours are not recognised.

The introduction of elements that lead to considering agriculture in its social aspects, along with explicit measures, is a novelty that should be welcomed in the Italian agricultural landscape. However, the concrete impact of these measures depends on elements that require an evident willingness on the part of national policymakers to implement them.

6. POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Both the Strategic *Dialogue* and the *Vision* have highlighted some common elements that may influence the future policy governance for the agricultural sector and rural areas. First, budget simplification of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) may require establishing a single fund for development policies and a plan for each country, which would contain key reforms and investments focused on common priorities.

Second, CAP is still a central tool for achieving the objectives of competitiveness and sustainability of the

agricultural sector and rural areas. However, it should improve coordination with other policies to achieve a synergistic and more effective contribution (Coderoni, 2023).

Third, CAP's strategic approach to programming is still valid. However, some implementation mechanisms need to be simplified, while at the same time strengthening a target approach and the responsibility of Member States to ensure achievement of the set targets.

Finally, Cooperation with stakeholders needs to be improved at all stages of the programming cycle.

The discussion on institutional sustainability, however, must start with an analysis of the governance of programming, management and evaluation of the three main policy instruments that directly or indirectly affect the agricultural sector and rural areas in the 2023-2027 programming period: the CAP NSP, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and the Partnership Agreement for Cohesion Policy.

The CAP NSP, which introduced unitary and national "program" for Pillar I and Pillar II and influenced the way interventions are programmed, consulted and approved, opening a broad debate on the role of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Regions and the paying agencies as Managing Authorities and in monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, necessitating the setting up of new coordinating "bodies". At the same time, the new objectives introduced with the "Farm to Fork" Strategy, new instruments (eco-schemes and social conditionality), the strengthening of bottom-up approaches, and mechanisms for performance assessment have introduced new actors and new "institutional" relationships.

The NRRP provided for "agricultural" interventions managed directly by the Ministry of Agriculture and other National administrations, firmly integrated with the NSP, but with different implementation and performance evaluation modalities and not always fully coordinated with CAP interventions.

Finally, the Partnership Agreement for Cohesion Policy provides for several national and regional interventions complementary to the CAP, in particular with regard to the development of inner areas, the promotion of human capital and environmental protection. Nevertheless, no formal coordination mechanism has been foreseen to ensure effective integration at territorial level.

A crucial aspect highlighted by the documents under the scanner is the stakeholders' dialogue: a process innovation tested for the first time in the CAP NSP through the Partnership Table (Henke et al., 2024). Italy is rich in experiences in this regard, carried out by local administrations collaborating with research institutions, the third sector, and private operators, through public par-

ticipation mechanisms such as Food Councils, explicitly mentioned in the *Vision*.

On all these aspects, the progress of these new programming tools, their coherence, and integration capacity need to be monitored. A comparison at the EU level of the Member States' capacity to respond to the unitary programming inherent in the PSP would also be valuable and desirable.

The thematic discussion on institutional sustainability highlighted some assessments for possible Reform scenarios. A first element concerns the CAP's separation from other policies. From a strategic point of view, the Single Fund hypothesised in the budget reform could make it possible to improve the integration of the agricultural sector into the economic system on fundamental issues such as food, environment, land, and food security, where the complementary action of policies could be fundamental. The issue of the Single Fund is central, both because of the risks of resource loss for the sector and due to its effects on delivery mechanisms and performance assessment, which are already complex and impact policies in various ways. Participants in the discussion emphasised the need to change the approach and orient the CAP and future policies towards: i) tailored and targeted policies, given the heterogeneity of the recipients, with the need to accompany these processes with practical tools for evaluating results rather than inputs and performance; and ii) forward-looking aid oriented towards rewarding behaviour that can generate structural changes in the system, overcoming backwards-looking payments that tend to sustain the status quo and widen inequalities.

The other evidence that emerges from the discussion is the gap between the vision of agriculture, the relationship with traditional challenges (environmental sustainability, generational change, innovation) and that with the new challenges (food, health, labour, trade) and the role of incentive and regulation policies as opposed to "softer" forms of policies that are more suited to interventions in the more downstream components of the food system (education, information, transparency, addressing a proper food literacy, as advocated in *the Strategic Dialogue*). The tendency is to focus solely on the CAP, but it is necessary to discuss policies more broadly, to consider possible new beneficiaries, how to avoid conflicts between different objectives, and how to leverage synergies between actors.

Given the above scenario, especially for Italy, it becomes crucial to discuss the role of institutional actors involved and how these new processes can be governed within the already complex governance of policies due to the requirement of the Italian Constitution, which

considers the Administrative Regions as responsible for setting up their regional policy for agriculture. Thus, in terms of institutional sustainability, there emerges the need to question how the national system should organise itself at the central level to interpret, measure and evaluate the system proposed to us by the EU, in terms of: i) integration and coherence of policies, in particular by looking at the programming tools that we have used in this programming, also with a comparison at the European level, and of the possible tools that may be proposed; ii) analysis of the trade-offs between the different objectives - inclusiveness, sustainability, productivity, resilience - and the visions of the different stakeholders; and iii) systematic implementation of mechanisms for evaluating policies, to allow real learning on the effectiveness and efficiency of the various interventions to achieve the set objectives.

The new European agricultural policy is undoubtedly more complex in terms of its political objectives and the inclusion of new stakeholders in the decision-making process. This increases the complexity of the governance process, requiring public decision-makers to have a greater capacity to understand the diverse needs of various stakeholders and, consequently, to allocate funds effectively. Given the current European context, which includes the prospect of a potential reduction in CAP funds, the vision of the political re-evaluation of the entire governance structure of Italian agricultural policy also becomes relevant.

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