



Brussels, April 2022

Agroecology Europe's contribution to the public consultation “Nutrients – action plan for better management”

Agroecology Europe, the European association promoting agroecology as a set of practices, a science and a movement across Europe, welcomes the Commission's initiative to work on an integrated nutrient management action plan.

Europe's environmental security is being impacted by the alarming losses and leakage of nutrients from agriculture into the environment¹. This situation is inherently related to high-input use of conventional farming. For this reason, the redesign of farming and food systems is necessary, and agroecology can offer guiding principles to improve the management and increase the efficiency of nutrient use in agricultural landscapes. The fast increase of nitrogen fertiliser price is an incentive for accelerating the transition towards agroecological systems.

For *Agroecology Europe*, soil fertility management in EU farming systems can mainly be improved by enhancing the synergies between livestock and crop production systems. This comes together with the extensification of livestock production of ruminants and monogastrics which would result in the (i) the restoration and resignification of semi-natural grasslands, (ii) the integration of leguminous crops (i.e. pulses, green manures and fodder plants) into crop rotations, (iii) the re-integration of livestock systems in specialised arable crop areas in order to avoid the transport of animal manure over long distances and to encourage better use of organic manure in specialised livestock production areas, (iv) (almost) permanent soil coverage by main and cover crops, (v) adoption of reduced tillage and (vi) implementation of diverse agroforestry systems.

This will allow the maximisation of fertility transfers within agro-ecosystems, reduce soluble nutrient use and leaching and make farming systems more resilient and self-sufficient at the territorial level. This necessary shift in production based on the principle of "less and better" for livestock farming comes with a change in dietary goals towards a significant reduction and qualitative turn in animal protein consumption (meat, especially pig and poultry meat, fish and dairy products) in favour of plant proteins² (Poux and Aubert 2018).

¹ Buckwell, A. Nadeu, E. 2016. Nutrient Recovery and Reuse (NRR) in European agriculture. A review of the issues, opportunities, and actions. RISE Foundation, Brussels.

² Poux X. & Aubert P.-M. 2018. An agroecological Europe in 2050: multifunctional agriculture for healthy eating. Findings from the Ten Years For Agroecology (TYFA) modeling exercise. IDDRI Study 09/18: 74 pp

This is why we encourage the Commission to demand a high level of ambition in the national strategic plans of each Member State that supports farming practices based on increased diversification and mixed crop-livestock production systems. Eco-schemes, in this sense, represent a significant lever. In that sense, the integration of legumes and the maintenance of permanent grasslands must be supported significantly.

Integrated nutrient management must also be implemented at the territorial and regional level. Particular support for the development of territorial value chains that valorise intermediate crops, grain and forage legumes, and sustainable livestock production should be established to encourage these changes in production and consumption practices. In this regard, demand-side policies should also be put in place through the support of sustainable and local public food procurements, for instance.

Agroecology Europe is at the disposal of the Commission for any request it may have and would be pleased to offer its expertise in the legislative proposal on soil health.

For further information, please contact our Secretariat:

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