

Transition to an Environmentally Friendly Food System in Europe -Including Economic and Social Sustainability-

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1. Introduction

There is an increasing need to solve global challenges. Under this situation, in Europe, efforts are underway to transition to a food system that includes economic and social sustainability. Specifically, there is an initiative to make the food system fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly. This is in accordance with the European Green Deal (hereinafter “EGD”) released in 2019 and with Farm to Fork (hereinafter “F2F”), a strategy released in 2020 that is being pursued under EGD. This article discusses the research results regarding a sustainable food system in Europe, focusing on (1) compatibility with both economic and international competitiveness, (2) consistency with the EU’s new Common Agricultural Policy (2023-2027), and (3) the importance of labour.

2. Transition to an environmentally friendly food system: compatibility with both economic and international competitiveness

In Europe, a new growth strategy is being promoted in accordance with EGD, F2F, etc. through the regional transitions to a food system that is environmentally friendly and sustainable. Table 1 shows examples of specific measures related to this endeavour. This strategy is expected to bring about quantitative and qualitative changes in agricultural production by transforming the overall supply chain, while strengthening the entire agricultural sector through an increase in added value and cost reductions. This applies to midstream, downstream, and upstream measures.

Table 1. Measures for transitioning to a sustainable food system in the EU (example)

Upstream (establishment of sustainable food production)	Measures for each field include:	(1) Carbon sequestration with the use of agriculture and forestry (2) transition to a circular bioeconomy, (3) reduction in the use and the risk of chemical pesticides, (4) pest control with the use of biotechnology and biobased products, (5) ensuring the safety and diversity of seeds (6) expansion of organic farming
	Cross-cutting measures include:	(1) Widespread adoption of precision agriculture and artificial intelligence through broadband internet access (2) Promotion of Agricultural Knowledge Innovation Systems (AKIS) to provide farmers with objective and individualised advisory services (3) Technical, investment, and advisory services
Midstream (revitalisation of sustainable food processing, wholesale, retail, etc.) Downstream (sustainable food consumption, transition to healthy and sustainable dietary patterns)		(1) Study regarding the introduction of sustainability criteria for the Geographical Indication (GI) protection system (2) Efforts to strengthen the resilience of the regional food system by helping to shorten the supply chain (3) Establishment of a sustainable labeling framework for food with respect to nutrition, climate, environment, and society

Source: Prepared by the author based on F2F.

There is an initiative in Europe aimed at expanding demand for environmentally friendly agricultural products. In the event that the agricultural sector fails to implement changes in accordance with such demand shifts, there is a possibility that not only environmental sustainability but also economic sustainability could be hampered. Regarding the transition to a sustainable food system, the European Commission states: “These solutions require human and financial investment, but also promise higher returns by creating added value and by reducing costs.” Thus, the European Commission is believed to be pursuing a new growth strategy that targets both environmental and economic sustainability through transformation.

On the other hand, regarding the transition to an environmentally friendly food system, the EU agricultural sector has expressed concern that it may face unfair competition with imports as a result of this strategy. In response to this concern, the European Commission has proposed the application of EU environmental standards within the region (Hirasawa, 2021:182). The European Commission has also expressed its intention to make the EU food sustainability criteria the global standard and to ban

imports of foods that do not meet the EU environmental requirements (Hirasawa, 2021: 175). For this reason, it is necessary to closely observe how the EU enforces its sustainability requirements which also aim to maintain global competitiveness.

3. Transition to a sustainable food system under the new common agricultural policy

The transitional period for the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) is between 2023 and 2027. The transition to a sustainable food system will be carried out in line with CAP. The new CAP features (1) enhanced environmental requirements for farm subsidies (enhanced conditionality) and (2) the establishment of a new support mechanism (eco-scheme) for advanced initiatives. This new EU policy framework is known as the New Green Architecture. In particular, the eco-scheme may be useful in efforts to assist achieving sustainable agricultural production, as shown in Table 1.

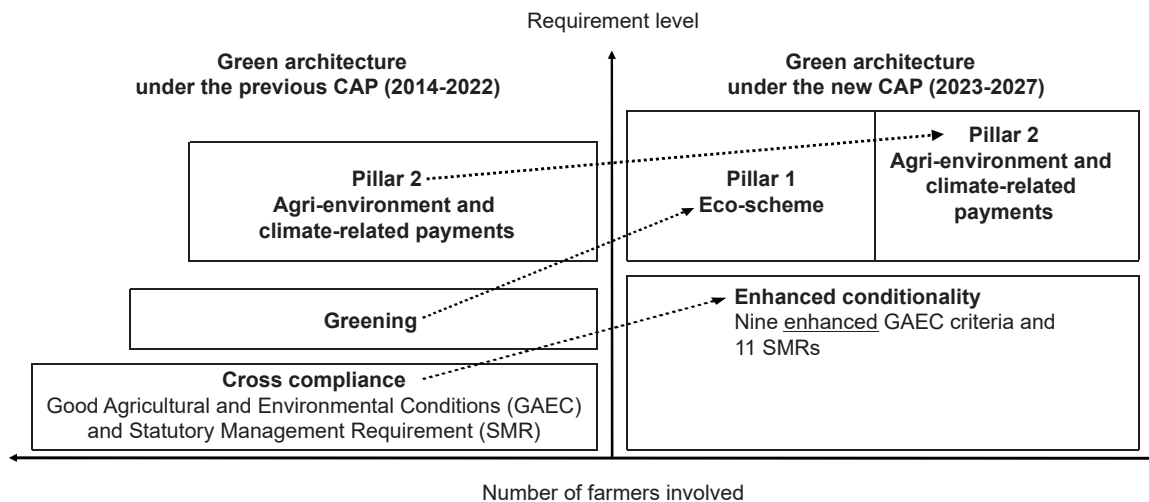


Figure 1. Comparison of green architecture between the new CAP and the previous CAP

Source: Rega, C. et al. (2022) Figure. 1 (translated by the author into Japanese), extra information added by the author

The institutional characteristics of the new CAP include the expanded authority of each EU member state and an emphasis on performance. This means that the EU's objectives, such as the establishment of a sustainable food system, will be more heavily dependent on the members' policy intentions and efforts than ever before. For this reason, it is necessary to closely monitor each country's policy planning with respect to various support measures under the New Green Architecture.

4. Labour in a sustainable food system: international labour migration and social justice

Labour can play an important role in a sustainable food system, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue will be examined from two points of view: international labour migration and social justice.

In the short term, restrictions on international labour migration amid the pandemic led to stagnation of agricultural production in Europe, which was also the case in Japan. Thus, the pandemic highlighted the role played by labour, including the labour supplied by migrants, in a sustainable food system. In the medium term, according to an outlook released by the European Commission, the number of farmers in the region may continue to decline at a rate of 2% per year, to about 7.7 million in 2030, although the decline may be partly offset by an influx of migrant workers. Thus, efforts to secure agricultural workers through international labour migration may become more important.

In many cases, labour migration from outside the EU to EU member nations is currently based on agreements between the two countries, and the worker migration mechanism is managed and operated by EU nations collaboratively with the sending countries, such as those in Africa. For example, Spain and France have bilateral agreements with sending countries such as Morocco. They hire seasonal workers in accordance with the mass-employment management system of the sending countries (Kuwaharada, 2022).

Securing agricultural workers through international migration is an important means of ensuring a sustainable food system. However, some considerations must be made regarding social justice involving migrant workers. European Parliament Research Service (EPRS), a think tank for the European Parliament, describes the characteristics of migrant seasonal workers and their work conditions. According to EPRS, local workers in the EU often avoid the jobs handled by migrant workers because wages are low and hours are long, and migrant workers are not always aware of their rights because they often come from poor and vulnerable communities or social groups (Augère-Granier, 2021).

The objective of F2F is to make the European food system fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. This objective involves social justice. Specifically, F2F states that the key principles enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights must be respected, especially when it comes to precarious, seasonal and undeclared workers. In response, the European Parliament adopted a resolution regarding the protection of seasonal and migrant workers (June 2020), while the European Commission released additional guidelines on seasonal workers (July 2020). All this has substantial implications for Japan because establishing a mechanism for dealing with foreign workers is an important policy concern for the nation as well. Japan must closely watch how the situation unfolds in Europe.

[References]

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