

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Read the text. Words in bold are defined in the exercise at the bottom of the text.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was established in 1962, and was a crucial **cornerstone** of the European Economic Community, the predecessor to today's European Union. The CAP's roots lie in the aftermath of World War II, when food shortages **plagued** Europe, and a desire for self-sufficiency **took root**. The CAP's initial goal was to ensure food security for Europe's citizens, while providing a fair standard of living for its agricultural community. It aimed to stabilize markets, increase agricultural productivity, and ensure the availability of food supplies at reasonable prices.

The CAP achieved its objectives through price supports, including import tariffs, export subsidies, and guaranteed minimum prices for farmers. These mechanisms facilitated the continued implementation of Europe's green revolution, as industrialised farming, the use of fertilisers and pesticides as well as irrigation and new crop varieties brought an end to food **scarcity**. However, these policies also then led to overproduction, resulting in the EEC's infamous "butter mountains" and "wine lakes". The CAP was also criticized for its environmental impact, its budgetary cost, and the distortions it caused in global trade.

In response to international pressure, particularly from the World Trade Organization (WTO), the CAP underwent significant reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s. The MacSharry reforms in 1992 marked a notable **shift**, reducing price supports and introducing direct payments to farmers, linked to production. These "coupled" payments, however, still encouraged overproduction.

The 2003 Fischler reforms then largely **decoupled** payments from production, linking them instead to environmental and animal welfare standards. This "cross-compliance" mechanism aimed to promote sustainable farming practices, **aligning** with the growing public demand for greener policies. These reforms led the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) being replaced by two spending pillars: Pillar I to support production and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund; and Pillar II to encourage rural development through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EARFD, a structural fund).

With the CAP consuming a significant portion of the EU budget, repeated calls for reductions in spending grew stronger. The 2014 reform **capped** direct payments to large farms and proposed a fairer distribution across EU countries. However, the CAP still accounted for nearly 40% of the EU budget (see [EU webpage and video](#)).

The most recent reform agreed in December 2021 and implemented in January 2023 aims to make the CAP "fairer, greener and more performance-based). It is characterised by increased national flexibility and an **enhanced** focus on environmental sustainability, with the introduction of the "eco-schemes". Agriculture and rural areas are also central to the [European Green Deal](#), and will be a key tool to achieving the [Farm to Fork](#) and biodiversity strategies of the Union.

In conclusion, the CAP, initially designed to ensure food security, has evolved considerably in response to international pressures and changing societal expectations. Its history reflects the **ongoing** challenge of balancing diverse and sometimes conflicting objectives: securing food supplies, supporting rural livelihoods, protecting the environment, and integrating with the global market, all while managing budgetary constraints.

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| A. Cornerstone | 1. A lack of something, insufficient supply |
| B. To plague | 2. An action still in progress |
| C. To take root | 3. To separate, to disconnect |
| D. Scarcity | 4. To trouble, to annoy, to be a nuisance |
| E. Shift | 5. To limit something, to put a ceiling on it |
| F. To decouple | 6. Increased, strengthened |
| G. To align | 7. Stone the corner of a building; an indispensable element |
| H. To cap | 8. To become established, to take hold |
| I. Enhanced | 9. A move, a change |
| J. Ongoing | 10. To straighten, to bring together |

Answers: A7; B4; C8; D1; E9; F3; G10; H5; I6; J2.