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The FarmForward Project: Sustainable and Transformative Strategies for Climate-Resilient Agriculture in VET

WP2

Climate-Resilient Farming Handbook

Handbook 10 Policy Frameworks and Advocacy for Climate-Resilient Farming

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QUALIFICATIONS AND
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING
DEVELOPMENT CENTRE



The FarmForward Project: Sustainable and Transformative Strategies for Climate-Resilient Farming in VET

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Introduction

The European Union has placed agriculture at the heart of its climate and sustainability agenda. Climate mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing carbon sequestration) and climate adaptation (reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience) are now embedded across EU legislation, policy strategies, and funding instruments. For the agricultural sector, this marks a decisive shift: climate action is no longer voluntary or temporary, but a long-term obligation that will continue to influence regulatory standards, market expectations, and public support mechanisms.

At the same time, the transition to climate-resilient farming is not only a technical challenge. While agronomic practices such as soil cover, crop diversification, reduced tillage, improved nutrient management, efficient irrigation, and agroforestry are essential, their uptake is strongly influenced by policy frameworks, governance arrangements, and economic incentives. Legislation defines baseline requirements, funding schemes determine which practices are financially viable, and administrative systems shape how easily farmers can access support. For many practitioners, these policy dimensions remain complex and difficult to connect to everyday farm management.

VET educators and trainers are key intermediaries who translate EU and national frameworks into practical knowledge that farmers and future professionals can use in real conditions. Effective education for climate-resilient farming requires not only technical training, but also policy literacy – the ability to understand how climate objectives are governed, financed, implemented, and monitored.

This module, *Policy Frameworks and Advocacy for Climate-Resilient Farming*, responds to that need. It supports VET educators and learners in understanding how EU climate and agricultural policies shape farm-level decisions, funding opportunities, and compliance obligations. Rather than treating policy as an abstract or external topic,

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the module integrates it into practical agricultural contexts, linking legislation and funding instruments to concrete management choices such as soil and water management, grassland use, landscape features, and climate-related investments.

EU climate governance is built on a combination of binding legal instruments and strategic policy frameworks. For most farmers and learners, EU-level frameworks discussed in chapter 3.3 become tangible primarily through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP 2023-2027 is the main mechanism through which climate ambition is translated into farm-facing requirements and incentives.

From a learning perspective, climate resilience therefore involves not only selecting appropriate farming practices, but also developing operational competence: knowing how to comply with rules, choose suitable measures, document practices efficiently, and plan investments that align with policy objectives.

This module also highlights the importance of local governance and collective action, showing learners how cooperation through producer groups, water user associations, and landscape projects can strengthen resilience while reducing individual risk.

Finally, the transition to climate-resilient farming raises important ethical and social questions. Climate measures can impose uneven costs and benefits across farm types, regions, and generations. Addressing these challenges requires attention to equity, proportionality, and intergenerational responsibility, which are key elements of a just transition in agriculture.

Overall, this section equips VET educators and trainers to translate EU climate and agricultural governance into clear, teachable, and farm-relevant content. It supports learners in developing three interlinked competences essential for climate-resilient agriculture: compliance competence (understanding baseline obligations), opportunity competence (identifying funded measures and support pathways), and civic competence (engaging constructively in multi-level governance). Together, these

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competences enable current and future agricultural professionals to navigate policy complexity with confidence and to implement climate-resilient farming practices that are technically sound, economically viable, and socially fair.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

This section aims to strengthen learners' policy literacy in relation to climate-resilient farming, enabling them to understand, interpret, and apply EU and national policy frameworks in practical agricultural contexts. By the end of this module, learners should be able to link climate policy objectives to farm-level decisions, funding opportunities, and governance processes.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module, learners will be able to:

- Understand the overall objectives of EU climate and sustainability policy and explain their relevance for agriculture and rural areas.
- Distinguish between binding EU legislation (e.g. European Climate Law, LULUCF Regulation) and strategic policy frameworks (e.g. European Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy, EU Biodiversity Strategy, EU Adaptation Strategy).
- Explain how EU-level targets and strategies are translated into national implementation through CAP Strategic Plans.
- Identify where climate mitigation and adaptation measures are supported within the CAP (conditionality, eco-schemes, agri-environment-climate measures, investments, advisory and innovation support).
- Recognise the role of governance beyond the farm gate, including local authorities, water management bodies, producer organisations, and community-based initiatives.

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- Understand ethical dimensions of the climate transition in agriculture, including equity, fairness, and intergenerational responsibility.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion, learners will be able to:

- Interpret key EU policy documents and identify their implications for agricultural practice.
- Explain how farmers demonstrate compliance with CAP requirements and how evidence is generated and used.
- Assess which climate-resilient practices are incentivised under different CAP instruments and how these align with farm objectives.
- Analyse trade-offs between productivity, environmental performance, and social outcomes in climate-related decision-making.
- Apply policy knowledge to practical scenarios, such as selecting appropriate eco-schemes, planning climate-related investments, or participating in collective adaptation actions.
- Communicate policy-related issues clearly and professionally in advisory, training, or stakeholder contexts.

For VET systems, these learning outcomes support the development of professionally competent farmers, advisors, and technicians who are capable of navigating increasingly complex policy environments. Rather than viewing policy as an external constraint, learners are encouraged to see it as a framework that, when understood and used effectively, can support innovation, resilience, and long-term farm viability.

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Policy Literacy for Trainers

This section provides trainers with a clear, teachable overview of the key EU policy and legal instruments shaping climate-resilient farming. The purpose is not to turn learners into legal experts, but to help them understand the policy “architecture” that drives farm-facing requirements and incentives. In practice, policy literacy enables learners to answer three practical questions:

What is required?

What is supported?

Who decides and how does it change over time?

EU climate governance combines two types of instruments:

- Binding law (regulations and directives): establishes legal obligations, targets, and implementation duties for Member States and administrations.
- Policy frameworks / strategies: steer priorities, guide future legislation, and influence how funding is programmed.

For training purposes, a useful message is: strategies set direction; laws set obligations; programmes translate both into money and implementation tools.

European Green Deal (2019)

The European Green Deal is the EU’s overarching roadmap for a climate-neutral and resource-efficient economy, explicitly including food systems, land use, biodiversity, and rural development. For agriculture education, its relevance is practical: it positions farming as part of the solution through lower emissions, healthier soils, improved biodiversity outcomes, and more resilient production systems.

For agriculture, this means:

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- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from farming through better manure management, precision fertilization, renewable energy use and low-emission livestock systems.
- Protecting and restoring biodiversity by maintaining natural habitats, crop rotation, hedgerows and pollinator-friendly practices.
- Improving soil health and nutrient balance, reducing dependency on chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, and encouraging organic production (target: 25 % of EU farmland under organic farming by 2030).
- Boosting resource efficiency through circular approaches – such as nutrient recycling, renewable bio-based materials, and reduced food loss and waste.
- Ensuring fair income and rural vitality, using the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to reward farmers for ecosystem services, carbon farming and sustainable land use.

Farm to Fork Strategy (2020)

Farm to Fork translates Green Deal ambition into targets and priorities across the food chain. It is not itself a binding legal act, but it strongly steers CAP design and related EU legislation. In training, it helps learners see that CAP measures are not random: they are a mechanism to operationalise food-system sustainability targets.

For agriculture, this means:

- Transition to sustainable food production through climate-smart practices, precision farming, and circular use of nutrients and water.
- Reduction of pesticide and fertilizer dependency by promoting integrated pest management, organic inputs, and soil-health restoration.
- Support for farmers via the *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)* – eco-schemes, advisory services, and fairer food-chain relations that ensure decent income and market position.

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- Improved animal welfare and reduced antimicrobial use, in line with the EU's "One Health" approach.
- Shorter and fairer supply chains, encouraging local and seasonal food systems to strengthen rural economies and consumer trust.

Teach learners to recognise "policy-to-practice translation": if a strategy prioritises nutrient loss reduction, the CAP will typically support nutrient planning, precision application, manure handling, catch crops, buffer strips, and advisory systems.

The European Climate Law

The European Climate Law makes the EU climate-neutrality objective for 2050 legally binding and anchors the 2030 net greenhouse gas reduction target at EU level. This matters for VET because it clarifies that climate action will continue to shape standards and support instruments over the long term. In other words: climate resilience is a permanent competence requirement for the sector, not a temporary trend.

EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (2021) *what it means for agriculture*

The EU Adaptation Strategy complements mitigation by focusing on how societies and sectors live with a changing climate. For agriculture, its core relevance is risk-based decision-making: drought, heat, floods, pests, and systemic risks require better data, faster deployment of proven solutions, and coordination across policies and scales.

A trainer-friendly framing is the Strategy's practical logic:

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- Smarter adaptation: use climate services, monitoring, and knowledge platforms (e.g., Climate-ADAPT) to guide choices.
- Faster adaptation: scale solutions that already work (soil-water retention practices, nature-based solutions, early warning, efficient water use).
- More systemic adaptation: align farm measures with catchment water governance, biodiversity goals, spatial planning, and funding rules.

The Commission is developing a new integrated framework for European climate resilience and risk management https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/adaptation-and-resilience-climate-change/european-climate-resilience-and-risk-management-integrated-framework_en?prefLang=da to help Member States prevent and prepare for the growing impacts of climate change. This will put the principles and objectives of the Strategy into practice. It will consist of a balanced policy package which, following a thorough impact assessment process, is expected to be adopted during the second half of 2026.

The EU Adaptation Strategy gives agriculture a clear direction: use better data, scale proven solutions quickly, connect field practices to landscape and policy, and collaborate beyond EU borders to keep supply chains resilient. For VET, the priority is practical literacy – helping future farmers, advisors and local officials move from climate risk awareness to well-supported, monitorable action on the ground.

Land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) regulation

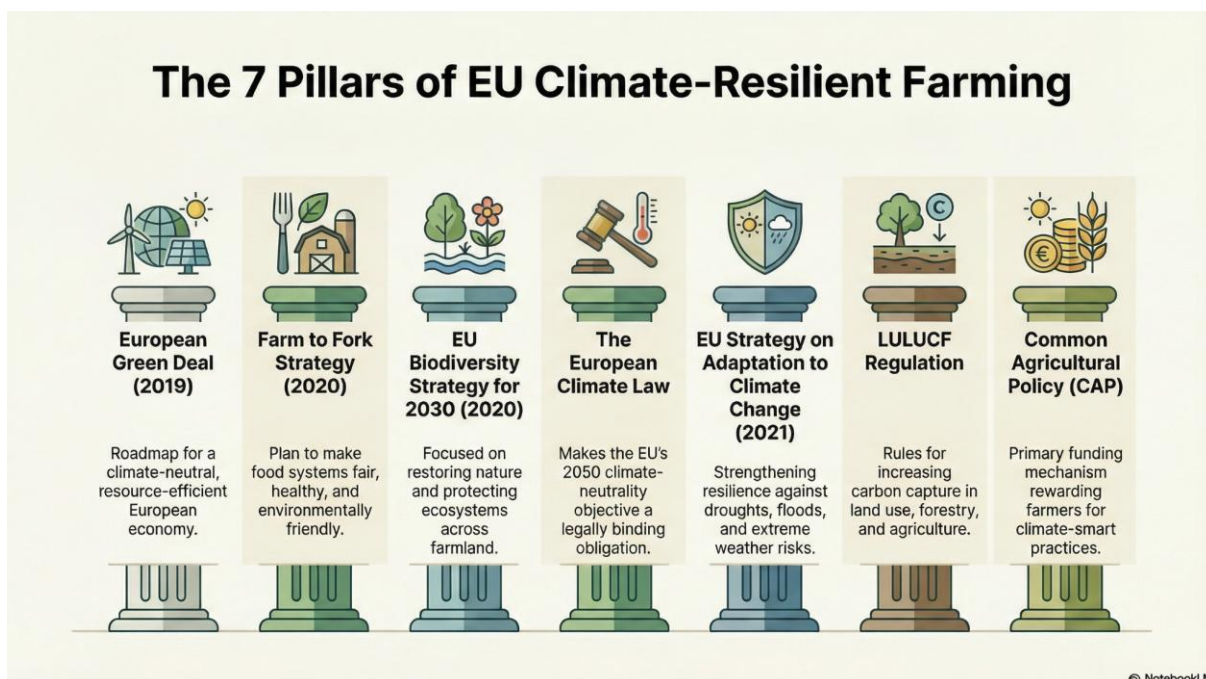
The proposals for adjustment of the Land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) regulation aim for increased carbon capture in agriculture and forestry, with important land cover change implications. The measures to achieve this, such as maintenance of grasslands, carbon farming and restoration of peatlands, will also help prevent soil

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erosion and reduce flood risk. The land sector can be both a source and sink of CO₂. Natural disturbances can lead to significant emissions, complicating management. Emissions and removals are subject to high uncertainties due to various influencing factors.

LULUCF establishes reporting categories and methodologies for Member States to ensure transparency and accuracy in emissions accounting. Member States must comply with a 'no-debit' rule from 2021 to 2025. National targets for net removals are set for 2030, requiring increased climate ambition. Flexibilities allow for trading emissions credits among Member States.

LULUCF encourages sustainable agricultural practices that reduce emissions, enhance carbon sequestration, and contribute to climate neutrality goals. It also integrates agriculture into broader climate policies, providing opportunities for farmers to benefit from financial incentives and contribute to environmental sustainability.



Picture 1: EU legislation covering climate change (Source, AI, Notebook LM)

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Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

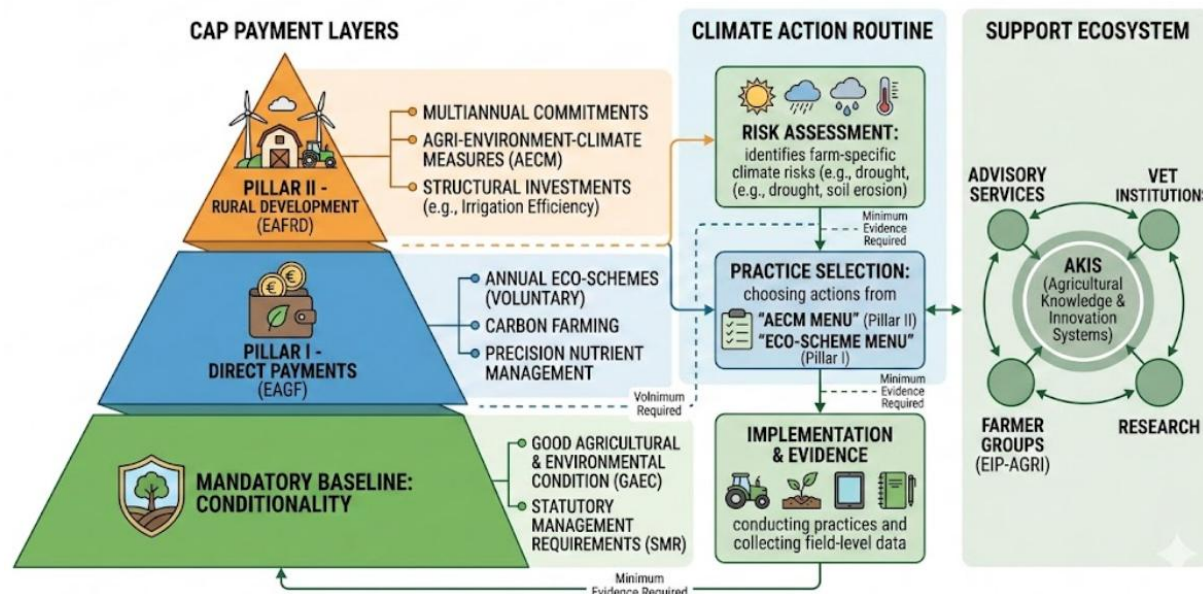
The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–2027 is the EU’s main financing and governance framework shaping how farming contributes to climate change mitigation (reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration) and climate adaptation (reducing vulnerability to drought, heat, floods, and biological risks). The reform is implemented via CAP Strategic Plans: each Member State designs one integrated plan (financed by both EU funds and national co-financing) that translates EU objectives into nationally tailored interventions, which are then approved and monitored by the European Commission.

Member States have substantial flexibility to select and calibrate interventions to their agro-climatic and socio-economic conditions, but within clear EU guardrails. In particular, they must:

- include eco-schemes in direct payments and allocate at least 25 % of their direct-payment envelope to them (mandatory for Member States; voluntary for farmers),
- allocate at least 35 % of rural development funding to measures supporting climate, biodiversity, environment, and animal welfare,
- and ensure all beneficiaries respect conditionality (a baseline set of statutory requirements and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) standards).

This architecture is designed to combine a compulsory baseline (conditionality) with incentivised ambition (eco-schemes and rural development commitments/investments), allowing each country to build a coherent climate package while remaining accountable for results.

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Picture 2: Structure of CAP payments (Source: AI visual, Gemini)

Pillar I: Direct payments (EAGF): baseline and annual incentives

- Conditionality (baseline requirements)

Farmers receiving area- and animal-based CAP support must comply with GAEC standards and statutory management requirements (SMRs). These set minimum expectations relevant to climate and resilience such as soil protection, maintenance of carbon-rich soils, and safeguarding key landscape elements (Member States specify detailed national rules within the EU framework).

- Eco-schemes (annual payments for climate/environment practices)

Eco-schemes are the flagship climate lever in Pillar I. Member States can tailor eco-schemes to national priorities (e.g., drought risk, soil degradation, livestock emissions), and farmers can opt in annually. Typical climate-relevant eco-schemes support practices such as:

- soil-cover and reduced tillage / conservation agriculture,
- carbon farming approaches (e.g., improved grassland management, agroforestry establishment/maintenance where designed as annual support),
- precision nutrient management and low-emission approaches,

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- biodiversity and landscape features that also improve resilience (windbreaks, buffer strips, field margins).

Pillar II: Rural development-type interventions (EAFRD) – multiannual commitments, investments, and knowledge systems

Pillar II supports longer-term structural change and risk reduction. At least 35 % of rural development funding must go to climate/environment/biodiversity/animal welfare measures. Key adaptation and mitigation instruments include:

- Agri-environment-climate commitments (multiannual)
- Investments in physical assets and infrastructure
- Risk management and resilience tools

The CAP framework explicitly supports knowledge exchange through AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems), where advisory services, education/training, research, and farmers are connected. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (often funded through CAP Strategic Plans) are a central mechanism: they co-develop practical solutions with farmers, advisors, researchers, and businesses, and disseminate results. VET institutions add value by embedding these results into curricula, micro-credentials, demonstration activities, and apprenticeships – turning project outputs into teachable routines and competencies.

EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (2020)

The *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (2020)* is a central component of the *European Green Deal*, setting out the EU's long-term vision to halt and reverse biodiversity loss across the continent. It provides the political and legislative framework for restoring nature, protecting ecosystems, and integrating biodiversity into all sectors of the economy – including agriculture, forestry, and rural development. It directly shapes agricultural and environmental policy by linking biodiversity conservation to the

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Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU Nature Directives (Birds and Habitats), and upcoming legislation such as the Nature Restoration Law.

For agriculture, this means:

- Protecting and restoring high-diversity landscapes, such as hedgerows, flower strips, wetlands, and peatlands that provide essential ecosystem services.
- Preserving carbon-rich soils and preventing land degradation through sustainable land-use planning and nature-based solutions.
- Allocating at least 10 % of agricultural land to non-productive features that enhance biodiversity and landscape connectivity.
- Using eco-schemes and agri-environment-climate measures under the CAP to support pollinators, soil life, and nutrient cycling.
- Reducing the negative impacts of intensive agriculture by promoting extensive grazing, crop diversification, and agroecology.

For VET learners and educators, the strategy emphasizes skills related to biodiversity monitoring, ecosystem management, and policy literacy. Learners should understand how biodiversity protection is embedded within EU and national policy frameworks and how it connects to farm-level decisions and funding mechanisms.

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Incentives and Finance Map

Climate-resilient farming is often discussed as “what to do” on the field (soil cover, water retention, crop diversification), but farms also need a clear view of “how to pay for it.” In the EU, adaptation and mitigation are financed through a portfolio of instruments, not one single programme. The most practical way to teach this is to show learners a simple map that connects: farm practices → financing channels → application route → evidence/eligibility requirements.

Most climate-related measures are funded through one (or a combination) of these three support types:

- Area/animal-based payments (subsidies)
Reward eligible land management and practices. This is where CAP conditionality and eco-schemes matter most. Subsidies help farmers keep good practices running.
- Project or investment grants (capital support)
Co-finance equipment, infrastructure and innovation projects (e.g., efficient irrigation, manure storage, precision technologies, renewable energy, landscape restoration). Grants help farmers change systems.
- Fiscal incentives (tax relief) and financial instruments
Depending on the Member State: accelerated depreciation, reduced taxation for specific investments, preferential loans/guarantees, or insurance/mutual funds for climate risk (often linked to public support frameworks). Fiscal/financial tools help farmers invest and manage risk.

CAP: the core finance channel for farm-level adaptation

The CAP 2023–2027 is the EU’s main instrument translating climate objectives into farm-facing incentives via CAP Strategic Plans. EU sets the common objectives and the legal toolbox, while each Member State designs its own CAP Strategic Plan - selecting the interventions, defining eligibility and requirements, and allocating

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budgets within mandatory minimum shares for climate and environmental delivery. Each member state chooses the interventions which address problems in their country and are specific for their agriculture.

Pillar I: Direct payments (EAGF) – baseline + annual incentives

Eco-schemes are the flagship “annual adaptation/mitigation incentive.” EU countries must allocate a minimum share of direct payments to eco-schemes, while participation is voluntary for farmers. Farmers apply through the annual area-based application system (IACS) managed by the national paying agency. They can choose eco-schemes that match the farm’s main risk (drought/erosion/heat stress), and ensure the practice is implemented for the required period. Eco-schemes are paid for “beyond baseline,” so the farm must first be compliant. Farmers should select few measures done well, rather than many measures with weak evidence (photos/logs/parcel clarity). The same cost/practice cannot usually be claimed twice under different interventions unless explicitly allowed.

Pillar II: Rural development-type interventions (EAFRD) - multiannual commitments + investments

At EU level, Pillar II is financed through the EAFRD and the Commission provides budget and structure information. Farmers apply usually via targeted calls (investment calls, multiannual commitments, advisory/innovation actions) under the national CAP Strategic Plan implementation system. Applications often require: business/technical plan, quotations, permits (if needed), and proof of eligibility (farm status, land titles/leases, financial capacity). It is suggested that farmers treat investment aid as a project. They must define objective, baseline, expected resilience gain, and measurable indicators (water savings, reduced losses, improved soil cover). For multiannual commitments farmers should verify that the farm can maintain the practice for the full commitment period.

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Knowledge, advisory and innovation (AKIS, EIP-AGRI Operational Groups)

Many adaptation barriers are not “lack of motivation,” but lack of know-how and tailored solutions. CAP Strategic Plans include financial support for AKIS and innovation/knowledge exchange. Operational Groups bring farmers, advisors, researchers and businesses together to solve practical problems and disseminate ready-to-use results. Learners/farmers should be trained to ask, “Is my need best solved by a payment, an investment, or an innovation/advisory action?” Often the best pathway is (c) first, then scale through (a) and (b).

Beyond CAP: EU programmes that finance adaptation around farms

Cohesion Policy can finance adaptation-relevant actions such as water management infrastructure, disaster risk prevention, digitalisation, and regional resilience investments - often implemented through national/regional programmes and calls. This channel is frequently used by municipalities, regions, water authorities, and SMEs, rather than individual farms. Farms often benefit indirectly (e.g., improved irrigation networks) or participate via partnerships.

In Horizon Europe funds R&I consortia agriculture is strongly represented in Cluster 6 and related missions/partnerships. Farmers can apply typically as part of a multi-actor consortium (farms + advisory + research + SMEs + public bodies). Farms and VET providers are “practice partners” who play important role in pilots, demonstrations and knowledge uptake.

The LIFE Climate Action sub-programme co-finances projects on adaptation (e.g., resilience to drought/water scarcity and floods, sectoral adaptive technologies, safeguarding natural resources).

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Interreg funds cooperation projects across regions and borders to address shared challenges, including climate adaptation and risk management. Interreg calls are used when the problem is “bigger than one region” and requires shared methods, data, or governance arrangements.

In addition to public budgets, carbon farming and removals are being shaped through EU-level certification. The EU adopted a Union certification framework for permanent carbon removals, carbon farming and carbon storage in products (CRCF).

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Compliance without Complexity

“Compliance” is often perceived as paperwork. In reality, it is the practical interface between public climate objectives and farm decisions, and it is the gateway to most support under the CAP and other programmes. The aim of this sub-section is therefore not to repeat legal texts, but to show how to meet climate-relevant requirements reliably with minimal administrative burden, using a simple logic: do the right practice once, record it once, and re-use the evidence everywhere.

- Under the CAP 2023–2027, climate and environment expectations operate through a layered system:
- a baseline (conditionality: GAEC standards + SMRs) linked to eligibility for payments;
- annual voluntary incentives (eco-schemes) that pay for additional climate/environment performance;
- multiannual measures and investments in rural development-type interventions that support structural change and risk reduction. The European Commission explains this baseline concept directly under “conditionality,” and the eco-scheme principle (mandatory for Member States to offer, voluntary for farmers) is set out clearly in its eco-schemes guidance.

The “Compliance Ladder”: keep it simple and teachable

A trainer-friendly way to reduce complexity is to teach compliance as a ladder with three steps:

Baseline: “Must do” (eligibility)

- Know which GAEC/SMR obligations apply and what they mean on the ground (soil cover periods, buffer strips, wetlands/peatland protections, permanent grassland rules, etc.). Baseline compliance is not “extra work”; it is risk management – preventing penalties and avoiding the loss of support.

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Add-ons: “Choose to do” (annual eco-schemes)

- Eco-schemes are designed to be opted into annually, with clear practice definitions and evidence requirements.
- Eco-schemes are best approached as a menu: select those that match the farm’s climate risks (e.g., drought → soil cover, reduced tillage; erosion → cover crops and contour practices; livestock emissions → low-emission manure handling).

Commitments and investments: “Build to last” (multiannual / structural)

- Multiannual commitments and investments (e.g., irrigation efficiency, manure storage, machinery enabling precision or reduced tillage) are where long-term resilience is built; they typically require stronger documentation, but also deliver larger risk reduction.

Evidence without overload: the Minimum Evidence Set

Most climate-related farm measures can be documented with a small, repeatable evidence set. The goal is to standardise what the farm records, so that the same documents support multiple checks, audits, and applications.

A practical Minimum Evidence Set (adaptable by country/measure) typically includes:

- Field/parcel map and crop plan (what is where, and when).
- Input and activity logs (dates of sowing, soil cover establishment, tillage operations, manure/fertiliser applications).
- Nutrient planning evidence (basic nutrient plan and records supporting N management – especially where nitrate rules interact with climate measures).
- Photo evidence (preferably geo-tagged, before/after for specific practices like buffer strips, cover crops, non-productive features).
- Invoices / delivery notes (seed mixes for cover crops, contractors for drilling, manure processing services, etc.).

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- Simple grazing/feeding logs (where grassland measures, extensive grazing, or emission-reduction feed strategies are relevant).
- Training/advisory interaction record (a short note of advice received – useful where advisory services are part of programme logic, including AKIS/EIP contexts).

Avoid “measure-by-measure paperwork.” Build one evidence pack, then map it to the requirements.

Audits and checks: what farmers should expect (and why it is increasingly digital)

In practice, CAP controls are administered through the EU’s Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). The European Commission describes IACS as an annual process built around online aid applications, with administrations required to provide pre-filled information that farmers can confirm or correct. This matters for “compliance without complexity” because it shows where simplification can realistically happen:

- Pre-filled digital applications reduce re-entering data.
- Parcel-based systems (LPIS) and monitoring approaches support faster detection of issues, which can shift compliance from punitive controls toward earlier corrections (depending on national practice).
- Remote/area monitoring is expanding in many countries, which increases the value of clear field boundaries, timely declarations, and basic photo/log evidence.

“Comply by design”: integrate requirements into agronomy routines

The lowest-burden farms treat compliance as part of management routines:

- Soil cover and erosion control: plan cover crops/undersowing at rotation design stage; record establishment date once; take one photo per field.

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- N management: align nutrient applications with crop need; keep a single application log usable for both climate and water-related controls.
- Landscape features: maintain a stable list/map of features; update only when changed.
- Wetlands/peatland restrictions: keep a “red flag” parcel list to avoid accidental non-compliance.

A note on simplification: stability matters, but rules can change

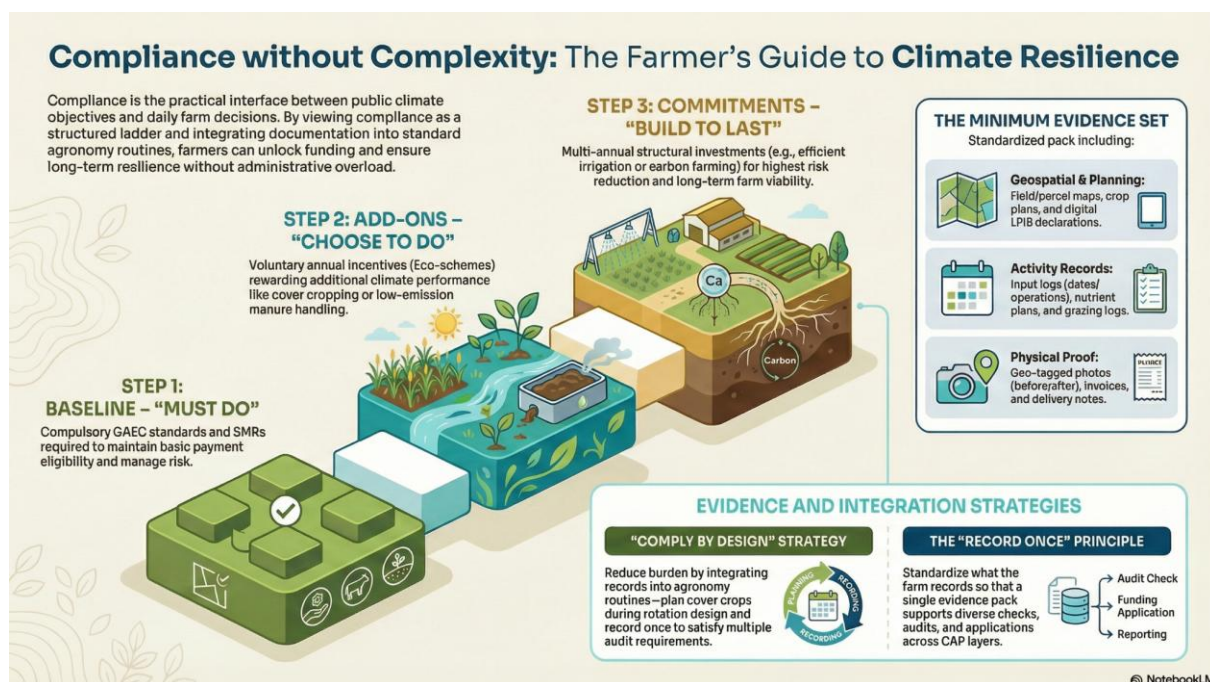
The EU has been pursuing CAP simplification to reduce administrative burden, and changes have been discussed and adopted in recent years. For trainers, the practical implication is:

- Teach learners the structure (baseline vs incentives vs investments) and the method (evidence pack + routine logs), because these remain stable.
- Remind them that specific GAEC interpretations and national conditions can change; farmers should check yearly national guidance and measure fiches.

Quick eligibility tips for CAP measures

- Do not start from funding – start from the practice: funding instruments vary each year, but the practice logic is stable.
- Avoid “over-commitment”: choose measures that fit labour peaks and machinery capacity.
- Check interactions between conditionality and paid measures (baseline vs beyond-baseline).
- Document simply but consistently (same logs/photos used for multiple purposes).
- Ask about combinations: some measures can be stacked, others cannot (depends on national rules).
- Prefer “system packages”: e.g., soil cover + reduced tillage + precision nutrients + advisory support is often more robust than one isolated measure.

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Picture 3: Compliance without complexity (Source: AI, NotebookLM)

Local Governance and Community Action

Many climate risks that affect agriculture cannot be solved by a single farm acting alone. Drought and water scarcity, floods and erosion, pesticide drift, habitat fragmentation, and catchment-level nutrient losses are all landscape-scale problems that require coordination across landholders and institutions. This is why climate adaptation is increasingly framed as systemic: aligning field practices with catchment water plans, biodiversity targets, spatial planning, and rural development governance. This sub-section shows how farmers can participate effectively in local decision-making, organise collective action, and communicate professionally, without turning farmers into full-time “policy experts.”

Local governance in climate-resilient farming

Local governance refers to the way decisions are made and implemented at local and regional level – by municipalities, river basin and water authorities, paying agencies, advisory services, protected-area administrations, local action groups, and farmer organisations. In practice, governance becomes relevant to farmers when it affects:

- Water rules and allocation during scarcity (abstraction limits, irrigation scheduling, shared infrastructure).
- Catchment measures (buffer strips, retention areas, ditch maintenance, drainage management, wetland restoration).
- Landscape features and biodiversity (hedgerows, field margins, ecological corridors, Natura 2000 requirements).
- Eligibility and verification of CAP measures (how rules are interpreted and checked nationally/regionally).

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Producer groups and collective marketing as resilience tools

Producer groups (cooperatives, producer organisations, informal clusters) are typically discussed as market instruments. In climate-resilient farming, they also function as risk-management and innovation platforms, because they can:

- Share costs of equipment and services (e.g., direct-drilling, composting, precision nutrient tools, on-farm monitoring).
- Improve bargaining power to invest in resilience (e.g., contracts that reward quality under heat stress, insurance products, diversification).
- Provide a structure to host demonstrations, peer learning, and data sharing, linking well with the CAP's emphasis on AKIS and innovation uptake.

Water User Associations (WUAs): drought governance in practice

Where irrigation exists or is being developed Water User Associations and similar collective arrangements can reduce conflict and increase efficiency by turning “private” irrigation into coordinated water stewardship. Typical functions include:

- Setting local rules for fair allocation during scarcity (rotation schedules, priority uses, caps).
- Coordinating maintenance and investment in shared infrastructure (pumps, canals, storage, metering).
- Linking farm decisions to catchment-level planning and drought preparedness (early warning, restrictions, emergency plans).

Landscape projects: nature-based solutions at scale

Landscape projects are structured collaborations where multiple landholders coordinate measures across parcels (often with municipalities, NGOs, protected-area managers, and advisors). They are particularly effective for nature-based solutions (NbS) such as:

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- Riparian buffers, remeandering, wetland restoration (flood buffering, drought resilience).
- Hedgerows/shelterbelts (reduced wind erosion, microclimate benefits).
- Habitat connectivity and pollinator infrastructure (stability of yields and ecosystem services).

Farmer voices: constructive advocacy and participation

“Farmer voice” is not only protest or media attention. It is also structured participation in consultations, stakeholder boards, local planning processes, and programme design. In the CAP context, farmers’ experiences with conditionality and eco-schemes matter because they reveal where incentives work and where rules create unnecessary burden. Practical ways farmers can engage constructively include:

- Participating in consultations for national/regional strategies (CAP implementation choices, adaptation plans, biodiversity measures).
- Providing field evidence on what works (pilot results, cost/time implications, monitoring feasibility).
- Working through representative bodies (producer organisations, chambers, advisory networks) to propose improvements that keep objectives but reduce friction.

Media basics for farmers and advisors

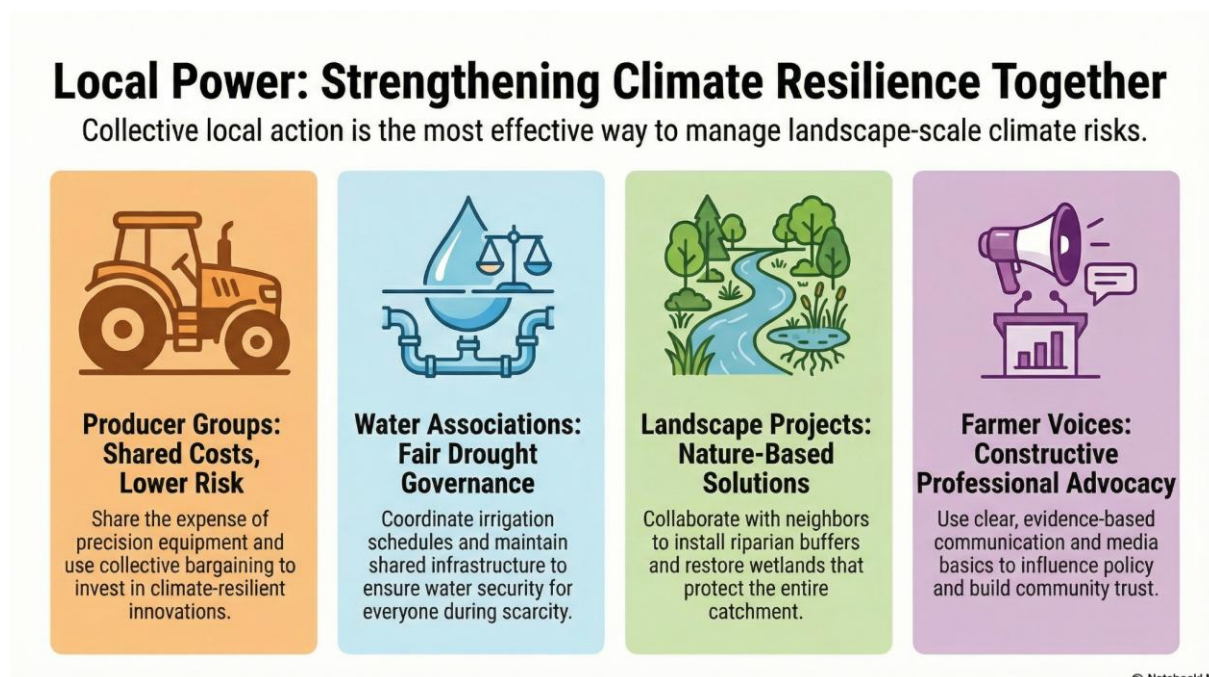
Climate topics can polarise. Learners benefit from basic media competence that protects reputations and improves trust.

Key principles to teach:

- Clarity: one message per communication (what happened, what is needed, what farmers are doing).
- Evidence: use numbers and observations that can be verified (dates, photos, rainfall records, crop outcomes).

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- Tone: calm, factual, respectful – avoid blaming or speculation.
- Audience: adjust language for local community, policymakers, or consumers.
- Digital hygiene: keep records of posts, avoid sharing sensitive data, and ensure consistency with farm documentation.



Picture 4: Collective local action (Source: AI, NotebookLM)

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Ethics and Transition

Climate-smart and regenerative farming are not only technical or environmental challenges; they are fundamentally ethical and societal transitions. Policies and practices aimed at climate mitigation and adaptation must therefore be assessed through lenses of equity, inclusion, intergenerational justice, and fair distribution of costs and benefits.

Equity and Fairness

Climate measures can impose uneven burdens across farming systems. Small and medium-sized farms, farms in marginal areas, and labor-intensive systems often face higher relative transition costs and lower financial buffers. Ethical climate farming requires:

- Fair access to public support (eco-schemes, agri-environment-climate measures, advisory services).
- Proportional administrative requirements that do not disadvantage smaller holdings.
- Recognition of non-market contributions such as ecosystem services, landscape stewardship, and cultural heritage.

A just transition implies that farmers are not penalised for past structural constraints but are supported in adapting to new expectations.

Smallholders and Family Farms

Smallholders and family farms play a disproportionate role in maintaining rural vitality, biodiversity, and local food systems, yet they often have limited access to capital, land, and innovation. Ethical transition pathways should:

- Prioritise advisory support and peer-to-peer learning.
- Enable collective solutions (producer groups, machinery rings, landscape-level cooperation).

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- Avoid “one-size-fits-all” standards that favour large, capital-intensive farms.

As highlighted by Food and Agriculture Organisation, inclusive climate strategies are essential to avoid widening social and economic inequalities in rural areas.

Youth and Intergenerational Responsibility

Young farmers face structural barriers such as land access, high investment costs, and income instability, while simultaneously being expected to drive innovation and climate action. Ethical climate farming must therefore:

- Support generational renewal through targeted incentives and start-up support.
- Ensure that climate policies enhance long-term farm viability rather than short-term compliance.
- Recognize farming as a profession that carries stewardship responsibilities toward future generations.

Intergenerational justice requires that today’s climate actions do not transfer disproportionate risks or degraded resources to those who will farm tomorrow.

Balancing Trade-offs

Climate farming inevitably involves trade-offs: productivity versus biodiversity, short-term income versus long-term resilience, local food security versus global market pressures. Ethical decision-making means:

- Making trade-offs explicit rather than hidden.
- Involving farmers and communities in decision processes.
- Accepting that “optimal” solutions may differ by region, farm type, and social context.

Transparent governance and participatory approaches help ensure that climate measures are socially legitimate and practically workable.

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The Ethical Path to Climate Resilience

The climate transition must be a “Just Transition” that leaves no farmer behind.



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Picture 5: The ethics in climate resilience (Source: AI, NotebookLM)

Ultimately, climate farming transitions will only succeed if they are perceived as fair, credible, and meaningful by those expected to implement them. Ethics is therefore not an add-on, but a core condition for durable climate action in agriculture – linking environmental ambition with social cohesion and rural resilience.

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Self-Assessment Questions

Self-Check Questions

1. Can I explain the overall objective of the European Green Deal and its relevance for agriculture?
2. Do I understand how EU climate and biodiversity strategies influence national agricultural policies?
3. Can I distinguish between binding EU legislation (e.g. Climate Law, LULUCF) and policy strategies (e.g. Farm to Fork, Biodiversity Strategy)?
4. Do I understand how the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) supports climate mitigation and adaptation in agriculture? (CAP 2023–2027)
5. What evidence and procedures are used by farmers to demonstrate compliance with CAP requirements?
6. Explain the concept of a trade-off using the example of productivity versus biodiversity.

Knowledge-Based Questions

1. What role does the European Climate Law play in achieving climate neutrality by 2050?
4. How does the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change address risks such as droughts, floods, and heat stress in agriculture?
5. What is the difference between CAP Pillar I eco-schemes and Pillar II agri-environment-climate measures?
6. Which CAP instruments reward farmers for carbon farming, biodiversity protection, and soil management?
7. What are the key objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy regarding pesticides, fertilizers, organic farming, and food systems?
8. How does the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 influence land use, farming practices, and CAP conditionality?

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9. Which EU funding instruments support biodiversity and sustainable farming?
10. What does the concept of a “just transition” mean in the context of agriculture and climate change?
11. How can collective approaches (e.g. cooperatives, producer groups, machinery sharing) help reduce social and economic risks during the transition?
12. How do farmers demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)?

Application-Based Exercises

Policy Mapping Exercise Task (30-45 min)

Analyse how the *EU policy covering climate change* is implemented within your country’s agricultural and environmental policies. Focus on governance structures, funding mechanisms, and the integration of climate change targets into CAP and national legislation.

Mapping steps:

1. Identify national or regional measures that support climate adaptation (varieties, nature based solutions, pollinator action plans, or landscape connectivity projects...).
2. Map key institutions and governance bodies: ministries of agriculture and environment, national parks, paying agencies, and nature protection authorities...
3. Analyze funding flows from CAP eco-schemes, programmes and projects, and Cohesion Policy that contribute to climate goals.
4. Assess policy coherence: determine how climate objectives are aligned or in conflict with other national policies (e.g. energy, forestry, or infrastructure development).

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5. Evaluate implementation challenges such as administrative complexity, conflicting incentives, or lack of monitoring capacity.
6. Benchmark or compare: analyze how other EU Member States approach climate adaptation integration within agriculture.

“Compliance Pack” Exercise (30–45 minutes)

Learners work individually or in small groups to simulate the preparation of a CAP Compliance Pack for one selected climate-related farming measure, such as winter greening / catch crops. The exercise focuses on identifying the minimum set of evidence required to demonstrate compliance across different CAP layers, while reflecting on proportionality and administrative burden.

Step 1 – Selection of the measure

Each group chooses one climate measure relevant to climate mitigation or adaptation (e.g. winter greening, cover crops, reduced tillage). The chosen measure should be applicable at farm level and commonly supported under CAP instruments.

Step 2 – Identification of CAP layers

Learners briefly map the measure against three CAP dimensions:

- Baseline requirements (conditionality / GAEC),
- Eco-schemes (voluntary annual commitments),
- Investment or support logic (e.g. equipment, advisory support, establishment costs).

Step 3 – Assembly of the Minimum Evidence Set

Learners compile a concise list of documents, records, and digital evidence that a farmer would realistically need to provide, such as:

- field records or crop plans,

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- photographic or geotagged evidence,
- declarations in digital CAP systems,
- invoices or proof of investment (if applicable).

The emphasis is on what is necessary and sufficient, not on exhaustive documentation.

Step 4 – Explanation and justification

Each group explains how their Compliance Pack demonstrates:

- compliance with baseline CAP requirements,
- eligibility for the selected eco-scheme,
- coherence with the investment or support logic.

Learners should also reflect on potential challenges, such as administrative complexity or feasibility for small farms.

Ethics

Imagine a small livestock farm in a marginal or mountainous area:

- What ethical challenges might arise when introducing climate measures?
- What types of support would be most appropriate?
- As an advisor or policy maker, how would you ensure that climate measures do not lead to farm abandonment in vulnerable rural areas?

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Annexes

Glossary

Agri-environment-climate measures (AECM): Multiannual measures under CAP Pillar II that reward farmers for practices going beyond baseline requirements to protect climate, biodiversity, soil, and water resources.

Carbon farming: A set of agricultural practices aimed at increasing carbon sequestration and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, agroforestry, and peatland restoration.

Climate adaptation: Actions that reduce vulnerability to climate impacts such as droughts, floods, heatwaves, and pests, enhancing the resilience of farming systems.

Climate mitigation: Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or enhance carbon sinks in agriculture, forestry, and land use.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): The EU's main policy framework for agriculture and rural development, implemented through national CAP Strategic Plans and structured around Pillar I (direct payments) and Pillar II (rural development).

Conditionality (GAEC and SMRs): Baseline environmental, climate, and animal welfare requirements that farmers must comply with to receive CAP payments.

Eco-schemes: Annual voluntary payments under CAP Pillar I that reward farmers for adopting practices beneficial to climate, environment, and biodiversity.

European Green Deal: The EU's overarching strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, integrating climate, biodiversity, food systems, and rural development objectives.

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Farm to Fork Strategy: An EU strategy aiming to transform food systems to be fair, healthy, and environmentally sustainable, addressing production, processing, distribution, and consumption.

Horizon Europe: The EU's research and innovation programme (2021–2027), supporting projects on climate-smart agriculture, biodiversity, soil health, and sustainable food systems.

Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF): An EU regulatory framework governing greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use and forestry, including agricultural land.

Nature-based solutions (NbS): Actions that protect, sustainably manage, and restore ecosystems to address climate and biodiversity challenges while delivering multiple benefits.

Policy literacy: The ability to understand, interpret, and apply policy frameworks, funding instruments, and governance structures in practical decision-making.

Policy coherence: The degree to which different policies and instruments are aligned and mutually supportive rather than contradictory.

Strategic Plan (CAP Strategic Plan): A national plan developed by each EU Member State outlining how CAP funds are used to meet EU objectives for climate, environment, and rural development.

Sustainability performance: The environmental, social, and economic outcomes of farming practices, often assessed through indicators such as emissions, soil health, biodiversity, and resource efficiency.

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Abbreviations

AECM – Agri-environment-climate measures
AKIS – Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
CAP – Common Agricultural Policy
CSA – Coordination and Support Action
EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EAGF – European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
EIP-AGRI – European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability
ETS – Emissions Trading System
EU – European Union
F2F – Farm to Fork Strategy
GAEC – Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition
GHG – Greenhouse gas
IPM – Integrated Pest Management
LIFE – EU Programme for Environment and Climate Action
LPIS – Land Parcel Identification System
LULUCF – Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry
NbS – Nature-based solutions
RIA – Research and Innovation Action
SMR – Statutory Management Requirement
SOC – Soil organic carbon
VET – Vocational Education and Training

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