

Recognised as an Associated event of the Irish Presidency of
the Council of the EU 2026



ÉIRE2026.EU
IRELAND2026.EU
Imeacht Gaolmhar | Associated Event



Think
2030

Science-policy
solutions for a more
sustainable Europe

16 September 2026

Think2030 Ireland Conference

**Policy brief: Agricultural strategic
dependencies: reducing them to
prepare for risk and crisis**

Paper realised by:

IDDRI

With the collaboration of:

 Sustainable
Economy
Institute

Agricultural strategic dependencies: reducing them to prepare for risk and crisis

The Think2030 Conference Ireland brought together Irish and European decision-makers, researchers, businesses and civil society to explore how the European Union can strengthen its resilience and competitiveness while delivering on its climate, biodiversity and zero-pollution commitments. It was organised by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) and the Trinity Long Room Hub, and was recognised as an Associated Event of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026.

The conference took place as IEEP marked its 50th anniversary as a Brussels-based think tank specialising in EU environmental policy. It was also held one day after the President of the European Commission set out climate change as one of Europe's most significant challenges in her State of the Union address, announcing a European heatwave plan and a climate insurance alliance. The conference opened three months into the Irish Presidency.

This brief summarises the second Science4Policy session of the day.

Lead: Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI)

Moderator: Elsa Régnier, IDDRI

Speakers:

- Fabien Santini, Head of Unit, Governance of Agri-food Markets, DG AGRI, European Commission
- Paola Grossi, Chair of the Copa-Cogeca Working Party on Risk Management and Insurance (online)
- Matt O'Neill, Climate and Agriculture Lead, Institute of International and European Affairs
- Angelina Frankowska, Senior Analyst for agriculture and food systems, Sustainable Economy Institute (IZG), Poland

Key highlights

- **Food security is no longer a given**

Seven years ago, food security would not have featured prominently on a European conference agenda. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine and other geopolitical events and the increasingly frequent extreme weather events such as the drought of summer 2026 have changed that. At the most recent meeting of the EU food security crisis mechanism (EFSCM), held the day before the conference, concerns over feed availability were mentioned.

- **Good years no longer compensate for bad ones**

The traditional model relies on good years offsetting bad seasons. But the European agricultural system is contending with a sharp rise in the frequency and scale of hazards of various kinds—climatic, health-related and market —making this model less suitable.

- **Risk mapping is necessary but is likely to miss what will be the next crisis**

Risk mapping carried out shortly before the invasion of Ukraine ranked geopolitics and war in neighbouring countries low. The lesson was that you never know what crisis that will come next. What is then required is quick reactivity and flexibility.

- **The summer of 2026 exposed important agricultural losses**

Drought and heat affected major crops and production systems across Europe, with significant losses in fruit and vegetables, maize, and fodder, generating pressure on food and feed supply.

- **Strategic dependencies strengthened farmers vulnerabilities**

The sharp increase in fertilizer and energy prices, driven largely by the war in the Middle East, has once again exposed how European agricultural dependencies on third countries make European farmers vulnerable to geopolitical shocks and market disruptions.

- **We need both short-term solutions (crisis management) and long-term measures (risk prevention)**

Short term solutions, mainly crisis support, are needed to support farmers to maintain their activity during and after a crisis. However, they are neither sufficient nor sustainable in the current risk paradigm: measures reducing structurally farmers' vulnerabilities will be key to ensure the viability of the European farming system.

Summary of the session discussion:

European agriculture has entered a period in which climatic and geopolitical/market shocks arrive too frequently for the traditional model of letting good years compensate for bad ones to hold. The session focused on two dependencies in particular, feed and fertiliser, both exposed by the war in Ukraine and by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The discussion asked what could reduce the vulnerability that turns these shocks into crises. The moderating institute set out its position at the start, calling for greater diversity in production and more circular nutrient management.

Food security has become a European risk, in particular affordability

Food security was once largely treated as a given in Europe. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine, energy and fertiliser price shocks, disrupted trade and drought have exposed how dependent the food system is on a much wider set of inputs, from energy and fertiliser to feed. The risk mapping carried out before the war also showed the limits of trying to anticipate the next crisis.

The discussion therefore pointed to resilience through flexibility. The recommendation was to strengthen coordination, early detection and early warning, while addressing structural vulnerabilities such as thin farm margins and strategic dependencies.

Climate shocks are moving through the whole food system

The summer showed that crop and livestock losses quickly spread to cooperatives, processors and feed supply. Cooperatives absorb part of the financial shock but can fall outside national emergency support, while prudential rules can make it harder for banks to finance farms already weakened by repeated climate losses.

One dependency can move through the whole food system

The Polish case showed how dependence on energy-intensive fertiliser can transmit a shock across the food system. Higher energy and fertiliser costs led to reduced input use and lower domestic fertiliser production, while higher agricultural costs fed through to food prices. The discussion highlighted how a dependency that appears specific to one input can create wider economic and food security risks.

The budget is part of the resilience debate

Member states approach agricultural resilience differently, with some focused on trade and competitiveness and others on European sovereignty and agronomic solutions. These differences make it harder to agree on what resilience should mean and how it should be funded.

The discussion argued for keeping resilience and risk management central to future agricultural funding.

A policy response that includes both crisis management and risk prevention

The discussion highlighted that resilience cannot rely solely on compensating losses after a crisis. Emergency support needs to arrive quickly enough to prevent temporary damage from becoming a liquidity crisis, while risk management tools should encourage prevention alongside compensation.

The session also pointed to a wider shift towards reducing dependencies that are a major source of vulnerability for farmers. Better soil management, crop rotation, precision farming and more efficient nutrient use can reduce exposure to external inputs, but farmers need the skills, incentives and financial support to make that transition. The recommendation was to build a risk management system that combines rapid crisis support with stronger incentives and investment for prevention.

A need for stronger coordination between policy areas

The Commission's Fertiliser Action Plan includes both short-term measures aim to encourage farmers to continue to buy fertiliser through price and income support, and longer-term measures that focus on reducing use, increasing circularity, diversifying supply and decarbonising European production. The discussion also highlighted the potential of recovered nutrients from wastewater and the need for investment and innovation to make these alternatives viable.

The broader message was that fertiliser resilience depends on decisions made across energy, industry and trade, not through agricultural policy alone. The discussion called for stronger coordination between these policy areas, closer dialogue with member states and the supply chain, and greater preparedness for future disruptions. The debate over strategic food and fertiliser reserves also showed that member states do not yet share the same view of what strategic resilience should mean.

Conclusions:

European agriculture, as well as agri-food supply chains, are exposed to and impacted by the compounding effects of risks and crises. The current period is marked by at least three main shocks: the Black Sea blockage, the hot and dry summer 2026 and the increase of energy prices. What emerged is a sector in which shocks are becoming less exceptional while many of the instruments remain designed for exceptional events.

The session put forward a range of responses, combining short term solutions to support farmers to cope with crises and longer-term measures to reduce their vulnerabilities such as nutrient recycling, diversification, lead markets for bio-based fertilisers. The practical

question is whether and how these instruments will be included in the current budget and policy negotiations for the period 2028-2034.



This work has been produced with the financial support of the LIFE Programme of the European Union. The paper reflects only the views of its authors and not the donors.

Author(s):

Elsa Régnier - Research Fellow on European agricultural sector, Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI) - elsa.regnier@sciencespo.fr

About Think2030

Launched by IEEP and its partners in 2018, Think2030 is an evidence-based, non-partisan initiative of leading policy experts from European think tanks, civil society, the private sector and local authorities.

By focusing on producing relevant, timely and concrete policy recommendations, Think2030's key objective is to identify science-policy solutions for a more sustainable Europe.

think2030.eu

#Think2030

