

SAFE asks European Commission to abandon plans to weaken Nitrates Directive in open letter

SAFE Food Advocacy Europe and other Brussels-based organisations including BirdLife, EEB, IFOAM, or Greenpeace have sent a letter to the European Commission asking it to abandon the plan to weaken the legal limit for manure in the Nitrates Directive, by extending it further to digestates. A previous extension allowed for a 50% increase in nitrates from manure that can be spread on fields, beyond the existing limit of 170 kg of nitrogen per hectare per year.

The letter addresses concerns previously raised by SAFE, such as drinking water pollution, or contamination of micro- and nanoplastics from digested manure, and calls for the Commission to refrain from opening the Nitrates Directive for revision. The signatories believe that the regulatory changes envisaged by the Commission do not solve the structural problem of European agriculture — sustainability — and call for the EU to support sustainable farming systems and practices that build soil fertility for the medium term.

According to the Commission's own science, weakening the Nitrates Directive would endanger the target to reduce nutrient losses by 50% by 2030 in the EU's Zero Pollution Action Plan.

The letter supports substituting mineral fertilisers with organic fertilisers like manure where appropriate, but only within an integrated nutrients management plan and bringing animal farming within ecological limits. To that effect, the letter calls for the upcoming Livestock Strategy to reduce excessive livestock concentration, rebalancing production across territories and strengthening farmer autonomy as envisaged in the Vision for Agriculture.