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Answer given by Ms Roswall
on behalf of the European Commission
(24.4.2026)

The Nitrates Directive¹ requires Member States to implement action programmes ensuring that farmers adhere to good practices for the use of fertilisers in areas vulnerable to nitrate pollution with the aim of reducing and preventing further such pollution. Pollution is defined as a situation where nitrate concentrations in surface or groundwater exceed 50 mg/l or could exceed this limit if no action is taken, or where surface waters suffer from eutrophication. The EU threshold for nitrates in drinking water remains 50 mg/l², but Member States are free to set stricter standards to protect public health.

The Commission closely follows the implementation of the Nitrates Directive in the Member States. Based on their reports for 2020-2023, an EU summary report is currently in preparation. The Commission is finalising an evaluation of the Directive, expected later in 2026. The Commission is in contact with national authorities and has over the years initiated numerous infringement proceedings to ensure effective enforcement of the Directive. Also, the Common Agricultural Policy³ provides Member States several tools to support farmers towards sustainable nutrients management.

The Commission is not conducting scientific studies on individual cancer risk factors and their social costs but supports Member States in their efforts to improve cancer prevention, early detection and care through Europe's Beating Cancer Plan⁴. Relevant actions addressing colorectal cancer include the European Code Against Cancer⁵, the EU-funded Joint Action EUCanScreen⁶, the development of European guidelines and a quality assurance scheme for colorectal cancer prevention, screening and treatment.

¹ Council Directive 91/676/EEC of 12 December 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources, OJ L 375, 31.12.1991, pp. 1–8.

² Directive (EU) 2020/2184 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2020 on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast), OJ L 435, 23.12.2020, pp. 1–62.

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013, OJ L 435, 6.12.2021, pp. 1–186.

⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/public-health/european-health-union/cancer-plan-europe_en.

⁵ <https://cancer-code-europe.iarc.who.int/>.

⁶ <https://eucanscreen.eu/>.