

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-003185/26
to the Commission
Piotr Müller (ECR)
(31 July 2026)**

Subject: Impact of the evaluation of the Nitrates Directive on European agriculture and livestock farming

In its published evaluation of the Nitrates Directive, the Commission recognised that the current limit of 170 kg of nitrogen from natural fertilisers per hectare remains appropriate and did not propose any fundamental reform of this limit. At the same time, the Commission points out that in regions with a high concentration of livestock production, reducing the number of animals reared could be a solution to the problem of nitrate pollution.

This approach raises serious concerns given the high costs of mineral fertilisers, the growing competitive pressure on European farmers and the need to reduce the EU's dependence on imported inputs. Particularly incomprehensible is the Commission's assertion that the directive has not fundamentally affected the competitiveness of the livestock sector.

In this connection:

1. On what basis does the Commission consider that the rules and limits established in 1991 still correspond to the current economic, technological and climatic realities of European agriculture?
2. Why does the Commission point to a reduction in livestock numbers as a solution to the problem of nutrient surpluses, rather than prioritising support for the processing of manure, biogas plants, precision fertilisation technologies and the transport of nutrients between regions?
3. How does the Commission justify its assertion that the Nitrates Directive has not affected the competitiveness of the livestock sector, and will it provide a detailed assessment of its cumulative costs to farms?

Submitted: 31.7.2026

**Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(16 September 2026)**

The evaluation of the Nitrates Directive ⁽¹⁾ (ND) published on 15 July 2026 ⁽²⁾ shows that the directive remains effective and relevant in the current economic, technological and climatic context, including the limit on manure application in nitrate vulnerable zones. It also identifies opportunities to simplify implementation and reduce burdens on farmers ⁽³⁾.

Reducing livestock numbers can be a solution in regions where excessive manure production represents a challenge for the protection of ground and surface waters, but it is not the focus of the Commission's policy.

The Fertiliser Action Plan ⁽⁴⁾ of 19 May 2026 aims to promote better nutrient management. To boost circularity and cut emissions, the Commission will support the development and uptake of organic fertilisers and alternatives to conventional inorganic fertilisers, in particular bio-based fertilisers.

For example, it will explore the potential for extending the recovered Nitrogen from manure ⁽⁵⁾ rules under the ND to certain digestates, which can act as alternative to synthetic fertilisers.

Furthermore, the Livestock Strategy ⁽⁶⁾ of 7 July 2026 lays down a dedicated roadmap to enable a more efficient and sustainable circulation of nutrients across the EU.

The evaluation of the ND includes an assessment of costs and benefits associated with the directive's implementation. Intensive livestock producers in certain regions with very high livestock density carry significant costs associated with the management of excess manure, but the ND is not the determining factor in shaping the industry's overall development. This conclusion is supported by international competitiveness indicators as well as an econometric analysis.

⁽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, p. 1-8.

⁽²⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/nitrates-directive-evaluation_en.

⁽³⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_26_1594.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/agri-food/policies/fertiliser-action-plan-safeguarding-food-security-and-supply>.

⁽⁵⁾ RENURE : https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-welcomes-renure-agreement-nitrates-committee-2025-09-19_en.

⁽⁶⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: EU strategy on livestock, COM/2026/576 final.