



Agriculture is at the heart of our life. The main purpose of farmers in the European Union (EU) is to produce a reliable supply of healthy, high-quality food, but farming is not just about food. Farming is about rural communities and the people who live in them. Farming is also about our countryside and its precious natural resources. Without farming there would be little to keep many communities alive and in areas where farming is particularly difficult, as in hilly, mountainous and remote places, there would be a problem of land abandonment.

There is a wide variety of farm types in the EU, including intensive, conventional and organic farms. Most typical are family farms, often passed on from one generation to the next and the vast majority of which are relatively small. The average farm size in the EU is about 12 hectares of land (equivalent to about 20 football pitches), whereas in the United States the average farm size is around 180 hectares. Farmers keep the countryside alive and maintain the rural way of life, and in so doing they provide 'public goods' for EU citizens. The market does not pay for these public goods so it is only fair that farmers are remunerated through the common agricultural policy (CAP) for providing the public with these valuable and irreplaceable goods. The CAP therefore gives farmers financial assistance to ensure that they continue working the land to feed us and to preserve the landscape, rural development, our natural resources and cultural heritage.

Farming is a principal economic activity in most rural areas of the EU. There are nearly 44 million people employed in the agri-food industry/sector, working on farms and in related sectors, providing farm inputs, such as farm equipment or machinery or food processing, distribution and food retailing. The farming and food sectors together represent around 7 % of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the EU and this means the future is bright with possibilities for your students.

This module will help students explore:

- ▶ how the EU supports farmers who care for the countryside for us and how the whole of society — present and future — benefits from a countryside that is carefully managed and well looked after (see **worksheet 'Guardians of the countryside'**);
 - ▶ how the EU helps farmers to be more productive and to modernise and improve their technical skills (see **worksheet 'The modern farmer'**);
 - ▶ how the EU supports young farmers and pathways to a career in farming (see **worksheet 'The young farmer'**).
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The module's project suggestion is a visit to a livestock farm.



Additional resources

- EU agriculture map
- CAP factsheet
- Glossary

Detailed statistics on farming around the EU can be found at:

- ▶ Agricultural data — EU Member States
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/statistics/factsheets/index_en.htm
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http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/statistics/factsheets/pdf/eu_en.pdf

