REFOREST

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Policy Brief #1
Regulation and Governance for Scaling Agroforestry in Europe

Understanding the Implementation Gap and Post-2027 CAP Implications

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief examines what is needed for agroforestry to move from formal eligibility to practical implementation under the post-2027 CAP. Agroforestry is already recognised in EU policy, but it remains weakly embedded in the systems that determine whether farmers can access support, administrations can monitor uptake, and public and private actors can recognise its value.

The central issue is that agroforestry remains "eligible but invisible". It is allowed in principle, but still difficult to identify, programme, fund, monitor and reward in practice. This reflects persistent gaps in definitions, land classification, CAP eligibility rules, advisory capacity, monitoring systems and coordination between agricultural, forestry and environmental authorities. As a result, farmers face uncertainty, administrations lack comparable data, and agroforestry remains difficult to integrate into results-based policy delivery.

For policymakers, the challenge is how to make agroforestry operational within CAP delivery systems. Agroforestry needs to be visible within administrative and monitoring frameworks, supported through stable and predictable funding, and connected to the advisory, financial and market structures that shape implementation decisions. This requires a shift from scattered eligibility provisions towards a clearer implementation framework that can work across different farm types, regions and governance levels.

The post-2027 CAP offers a strategic opportunity to address these barriers. Agri-Environmental and Climate Actions, investment support, AKIS, advisory services, digital tools, CAP data governance and alignment with the CRCF can all support agroforestry expansion. Their impact will depend on whether Member State flexibility is balanced with common EU safeguards, clear eligibility rules, protected transition funding and proportionate monitoring requirements.

The recommendations in this brief focus on closing the gap between policy ambition and implementation. They aim to improve administrative visibility, reduce barriers to adoption, strengthen implementation capacity, and create the conditions under which agroforestry can contribute more effectively to climate, biodiversity, resilience, and rural development objectives.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Agroforestry will scale only if the post-2027 CAP moves from formal recognition to operational delivery: clear definitions, stable support, workable monitoring, advisory capacity, fair access rules, targeted funding and stronger links with sustainable finance and value chains.

SUMMARY TABLE OF MAIN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

No.	Policy recommendation	Core action	Expected contribution
1	**Make agroforestry measurable in CAP systems**	Create harmonised and interoperable agroforestry classifications within LPIS/IACS, CAP monitoring, LULUCF, CRCF and biodiversity reporting systems.	Improves visibility, eligibility, monitoring, climate reporting and evidence-based policy evaluation.
2	**Simplify and stabilise agroforestry support under CAP**	Provide predictable multiannual support for establishment, maintenance, restoration and transition costs, including early-stage support for years 0–5.	Reduces upfront investment risk, improves farmer cash flow and supports wider adoption.
3	**Make MRV workable for farmers**	Develop proportionate, tiered and interoperable MRV systems for carbon, biodiversity and ecosystem-service outcomes.	Lowers transaction costs, improves access to result-based payments and avoids excluding smaller farms.
4	**Strengthen advisory services, AKIS capacity and digital decision-support**	Embed agroforestry advisory services and trusted digital tools within AKIS, EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and Living Labs.	Improves technical support, reduces implementation risk and links innovation with farm-level decisions.
5	**Align agroforestry with sustainable finance and corporate reporting**	Link agroforestry indicators to CRCF, CSRD, EU Taxonomy, Scope 3 strategies and result-based payment frameworks.	Creates pathways for private co-finance, ecosystem-service revenues and value-chain investment.
6	**Address land-tenure, tree-ownership and eligibility barriers**	Clarify tenure, tree ownership, land classification and CAP payment rules for tenants, smallholders and mixed land-use farms.	Reduces legal uncertainty, improves access to support and enables long-term agroforestry investment.
7	**Develop spatial targeting and landscape-scale approaches**	Use spatial data, needs assessments and priority-area targeting to direct agroforestry support where public value is highest.	Increases environmental return per euro of CAP expenditure and improves landscape-level impact.
8	**Leverage cooperatives and collective models**	Support cooperatives, producer organisations and local partnerships to aggregate projects, share services and access markets and certification.	Reduces transaction costs, strengthens smallholder participation and builds local value chains.

Table.A1 Summary Table of Main Policy Recommendations. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agroforestry (AF) is widely recognised as a strategic land-management system and nature-based solution for advancing core EU agri-food, climate and biodiversity objectives, such as *the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the Farm to Fork Strategy.* Through its multifunctional co-benefits and ecosystem services, agroforestry supports climate change adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem restoration, rural development, and farm-level resilience. However, despite its strong policy relevance and socio-economic potential, it has yet to be successfully implemented at scale. In fact, under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support, AF uptake has historically fallen short of expectations. Only 10.4% of the agroforestry area originally planned under CAP support was established during 2007–2013 (2.9 kha of 28 kha), falling further to 5.6% during 2014–2022 (5 kha of 89 kha), despite agroforestry being programmed in 36 Rural Development Programmes across eight Member States[25].

This persistent implementation gap suggests that the challenge is no longer whether agroforestry is recognised in policy, but whether it is effectively integrated into the administrative, financial, advisory and monitoring systems that shape implementation. In many cases, agroforestry is formally eligible but remains institutionally invisible, as it is insufficiently captured in administrative systems, weakly reflected in CAP indicators, unevenly supported across Member States, and poorly integrated into advisory, finance, and monitoring frameworks. This "*eligible but invisible*" puzzle is the central concern of this policy brief.

Evidence from ReForest, supported by wider European research and stakeholder consultations, shows that agroforestry adoption is constrained by a combination of regulatory, economic, technical and institutional barriers. Surveys with agroforestry practitioners, Living Lab consultations and follow-up interviews identified subsidy misalignment, fragmented regulatory support, limited access to suitable finance, land-tenure constraints, income instability, market-access barriers, insurance gaps, weak advisory services and costly or complex monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems as key obstacles to adoption (Hajdukovic, 2025; Zibecchi, 2025). Similar findings have been reported across Europe, where management complexity, regulatory uncertainty, limited technical knowledge, labour requirements, establishment costs and delayed returns continue to restrict uptake. Evidence from EURAF, ECA, IEEP and EPRS further highlights weaknesses in definitions, monitoring frameworks and implementation capacity that limit effective delivery across Member States (Zibecchi et al., 2026).

Addressing these hurdles matters for the next Common Agricultural Policy cycle. The proposed CAP architecture for 2028–2034 is expected to play a central role in strengthening the resilience, competitiveness , and sustainability of EU agriculture in the face of climate change, environmental degradation , and geopolitical uncertainty. The European Commission's 2025 proposal commits to maintaining a robust budget while modernising CAP delivery through National and Regional

[25] For CAP 2007–2013, see Lawson et al. (2016), Options for Agroforestry in the CAP 2014–20, which reports weak implementation of Measure 222, including limited RDP activation and very low uptake: https://euraf.isa.utl.pt/files/pub/docs/policyupdates_1_lawson.pdf
For CAP 2014–2020, see Szedlak/DG AGRI (2017), EU Forest Strategy and forestry measures in rural development programmes for 2014–2020, which reports that Measure 8.2 was programmed in 36 RDPs across eight Member States, covering 84,000 ha and €130 million in planned public expenditure.

Partnership Plans (NRPP), with a focus on strategic planning, synergies across funding streams, and results-based implementation.

For agroforestry, the post-2027 CAP reform and the implementation of the Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming Certification Framework (CRCF) create a unique window to move agroforestry beyond formal eligibility and reduce its dependence on baseline unstable subsidy support. The proposed NRPP architecture, along with new agri-environmental and climate actions (AECAs), transition support, investment aid, advisory services, and digital tools, could help connect currently fragmented policy instruments and create conditions for blended public-private financing models. Yet flexibility by itself will not solve the problem. Without clear definitions and eligibility rules, stable funding, workable MRV, advisory capacity and common EU safeguards, agroforestry may remain allowed in principle but poorly planned, funded, monitored and rewarded in practice.

This policy brief argues that scaling agroforestry requires moving beyond formal eligibility towards a genuine implementation framework. Agroforestry must become visible and measurable within CAP governance and monitoring systems, while support rules must become simpler, more stable and easier for farmers to navigate. Implementation also depends on advisory services, workable MRV systems and digital tools that reduce administrative burden rather than add complexity. At the same time, agroforestry must become more investable by linking public support with sustainable finance, corporate reporting, results-based payments and stronger value-chain coordination. Achieving this will require a balanced approach that combines Member State flexibility with clear EU-level safeguards, common monitoring requirements, ring-fenced transition funding, and support for cooperatives, collective models and farmers facing land-tenure or market-access barriers.

BOX 1. Why Now? A Strategic Window for Agroforestry

European agriculture is entering a period of major policy and economic transition. The forthcoming CAP 2028–2034, the implementation of the Carbon Removal Certification Framework (CRCF), growing climate adaptation and water resilience priorities, and increasing sustainability requirements for agri-food value chains are creating new incentives for multifunctional land-use systems. This creates a unique window for agroforestry. Beyond its environmental benefits, agroforestry can strengthen farm resilience, support climate adaptation, improve water retention, diversify farm income, and contribute to Europe's competitiveness and long-term food security.

Failure to act carries growing economic and strategic risks for Europe. Climate change is already reducing agricultural resilience through more frequent droughts, heatwaves, floods and water scarcity, while scientific assessments from the IPCC and IPBES indicate that these pressures are likely to intensify over the coming decades. At the same time, farmers face increasing exposure to volatile commodity prices, rising input costs, supply chain disruptions, and environmental degradation. These trends threaten food security, water security, rural livelihoods and the long-term competitiveness of European agriculture.

Without greater investment in resilient production systems, adaptation costs are likely to rise, farm profitability may decline, and Europe could become more vulnerable to external market shocks and resource dependencies. Agroforestry should therefore be viewed not only as an environmental practice, but as a strategic investment in Europe's resilience and rural prosperity.

Table X Why Now? A Strategic Window for Agroforestry.Source: Authors' own elaboration.

2. Understanding the Implementation Gap

The limited uptake of agroforestry across Europe cannot be explained solely by a lack of policy recognition. Agroforestry is already aligned with EU objectives on climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, water resilience and rural development. It is also increasingly relevant to the post-2027 CAP, the CRCF, and the wider sustainable finance agenda. The problem is that this recognition has not yet been translated into delivery systems that make agroforestry easy to programme, finance, monitor and implement.

The implementation gap begins with the way agroforestry sits between policy categories. It combines agricultural production, trees, ecosystem services, and long-term land management, but CAP administration, land classification, forestry rules, payment systems, and monitoring tools are often organised into separate categories. As shown in the Discussion Policy Paper #1, this creates uncertainty over definitions, parcel eligibility, tree ownership, land classification, monitoring rules and institutional responsibilities[26] .

Farmers may hesitate to plant trees if they are unsure whether land will remain eligible for CAP payments, whether future income can compensate early costs, whether advisory support will be available, or whether monitoring requirements will be manageable. Public administrations also face difficulties when agroforestry is not clearly recorded in LPIS/IACS, CAP indicators, LULUCF reporting or biodiversity monitoring systems.

The result is a delivery gap rather than a simple funding gap. Support may exist on paper, yet adoption remains limited when farmers face uncertainty about eligibility, long-term support, compliance requirements, and expected returns. At the same time, public authorities struggle to monitor uptake, compare performance across regions and demonstrate outcomes – and these challenges are closely connected. Weak administrative visibility makes agroforestry harder to support, monitor and finance, while limited advisory capacity and complex verification requirements increase costs and perceived risks for both farmers and investors.

This is why agroforestry can be described as "eligible but invisible". It is recognised in principle, but remains weakly embedded in the systems that shape real implementation decisions. Closing the implementation gap under the post-2027 CAP, therefore, requires more than adding agroforestry to policy texts. It requires clear definitions, stable support, workable monitoring, advisory capacity, data interoperability and stronger links with finance and value chains. In practical terms, agroforestry must become visible enough to administer, simple enough to access, credible enough to finance and measurable enough to reward.

3. Post-2027 CAP Reform Context

The post-2027 CAP reform is central to the discussion above. It will determine whether agroforestry remains dispersed across several policy instruments or becomes a clearly defined, fundable, and monitorable pathway for climate resilience, biodiversity restoration, and sustainable farm investment across Member States. The European Commission's proposal for the CAP 2028–2034 is part of the wider reform of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

The main institutional change is that the CAP would be integrated into the new National and Regional Partnership Fund, with agriculture included as one chapter of the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP). This would replace the current CAP Strategic Plans and formally end the traditional two-pillar structure, while maintaining a ring-fenced budget for selected income-support interventions.

The accompanying factsheet ***"CAP post-2027: fostering farm sustainability"*** outlines the proposed green architecture. Under this framework, current conditionality would be replaced by Farm Stewardship, while eco-schemes and agri-environment-climate commitments would be merged into Agri-Environmental and Climate Actions (AECAs). These actions would remain voluntary for farmers and would support both the maintenance of existing beneficial practices and the transition towards more resilient and sustainable production systems (see Figure 1).

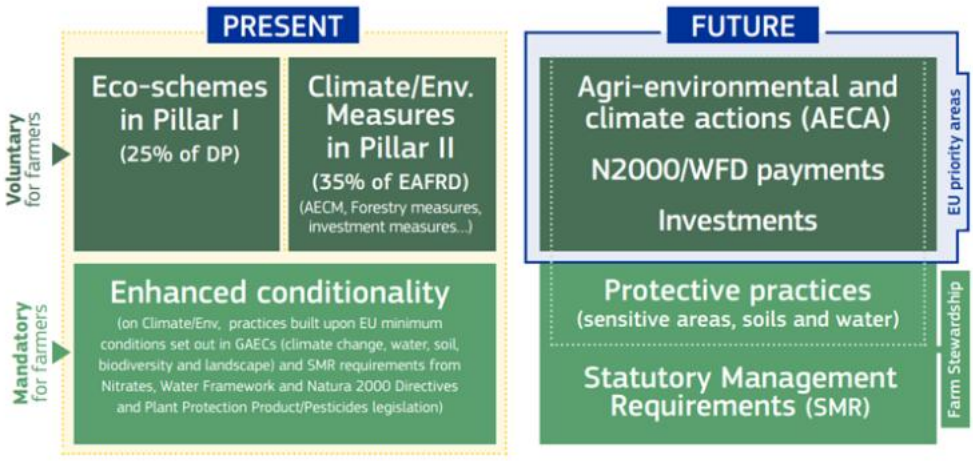

Figure1: Evolution of the CAP Green Architecture from 2023–2027 to the proposed 2028–2034 framework. Source: European Commission, CAP post-2027: Fostering farm sustainability (2025a).

DG AGRI's "***Best practices for agri-environmental and climate actions within the CAP post-2027"*** explains why this shift matters for agroforestry. The document describes how AECAs are intended to combine current eco-schemes and agri-environment-climate commitments, support both the maintenance of beneficial practices and the transition towards more resilient farming systems and allow payments to shift from compensating for costs and income foregone to rewarding ecosystem services. It also stresses attractive payments, multiannual commitments, territorial targeting, advisory capacity, result-based schemes, digital tools, and clear monitoring rules. This fits well with agroforestry, as these systems require long-term planning, upfront establishment and management costs, spatial targeting, and measurable ecosystem-service outcomes rather than short-term annual compliance.

EC's budget factsheet ***"For a resilient, competitive and sustainable EU agriculture"*** shows how the proposed framework would be financed. The proposal secures EUR 293.7 billion for CAP income

support and EUR 6.3 billion for the Unity Safety Net, while EUR 453 billion would remain available within NRPPs for national, regional and sectoral priorities. National co-financing would apply to several interventions, including all environmental payments, which could affect Member States' willingness and capacity to fund them. Figure 2 shows the CAP's place within the broader NRPF.

The legal anchor is the Commission proposal COM (2025) 560, ***"Proposal for a Regulation establishing the conditions for the implementation of the Union support to the Common Agricultural Policy for the period from 2028 to 2034" .*** It defines the CAP interventions, including degressive area-based income support, AECAs, risk-management tools, investment support for farmers and forest holders, LEADER, knowledge sharing, innovation, advisory services, and CAP data governance. It also confirms that Member States would have greater responsibility for defining protective practices, targeting support, and designing implementation systems.

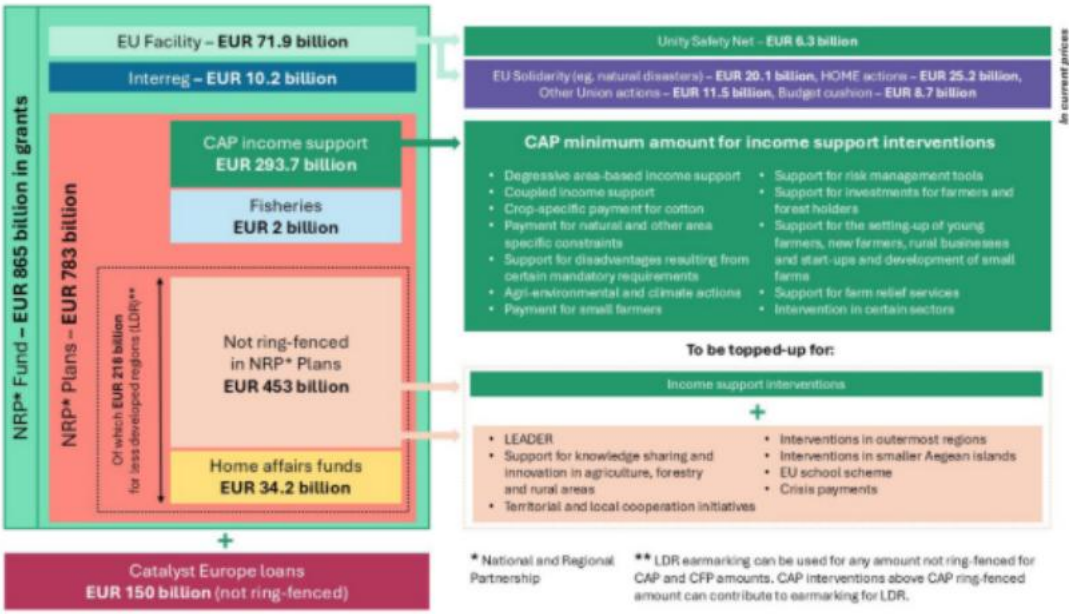

Figure 2. The CAP within the National and Regional Partnership Fund 2028–2034. Source: European Commission, For a resilient, competitive and sustainable EU agriculture (2025b).

For agroforestry implementation, the legal relevance of COM (2025) 560 is that it does not create one single agroforestry measure, but several possible entry points across the CAP architecture. Article 4 places agroforestry-related outcomes within the required environmental and climate priority areas, including "climate change adaptation and water resilience", "climate change mitigation including carbon removals", "soil health" and "preservation of biodiversity". Article 10 provides the payment channel through AECAs, covering "voluntary management commitments" and "voluntary transition towards resilient production systems". Article 13 provides the investment channel for productive and non-productive investments that contribute to the resilience of agriculture, food systems, forestry and rural areas, "in particular climate and water resilience". Articles 19–21 add the enabling layer through knowledge sharing, EIP-AGRI, advisory services, AKIS, interoperability, and CAP data governance.

The post-2027 CAP reform also needs to be read alongside the Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming Regulation (CRCF) and the wider EU sustainable finance and corporate reporting agenda. The CRCF

establishes an EU-wide voluntary framework for certifying permanent carbon removals, carbon farming, and carbon storage in products. The Regulation refers to agroforestry and other forms of mixed farming among the farming and forestry practices that can remove CO_2 from the atmosphere or reduce soil emissions, and which may be rewarded through the CAP or other public and private initiatives. It also sets quality criteria around quantification, additionality, storage, monitoring, liability, and sustainability.

The CREDIBLE Focus Group on carbon farming stresses that CAP and CRCF should be understood as complementary rather than mutually exclusive instruments. CAP support remains largely activity-based, while CRCF incentives are designed around certified results. Both can play a role, but full integration of CAP into CRCF-style payments faces short-term limits, including regulatory constraints and high MRV costs. A more realistic pathway is a combined policy mix in which CAP supports planning, establishment, transition, and advisory services, while CRCF provides a framework for verified climate benefits once systems can be measured reliably (CREDIBLE Focus Group 2.3, 2024).

4. Transition Dynamics: Who Gains, Who Resists, and Why?

The post-2027 CAP creates new opportunities for agroforestry, but implementation will depend on how different actors perceive the costs, risks, and benefits of the transition. Agroforestry expansion is therefore shaped by incentives, institutional capacity and political priorities that do not always align.

Agroforestry offers potential benefits for a wide range of actors. Farmers can improve resilience to droughts, floods and market volatility while diversifying production and income sources. Public authorities can advance climate, biodiversity, water and soil objectives through a single land-use approach. Food companies and processors can strengthen supply-chain resilience and reduce exposure to climate-related disruptions. Financial institutions and investors are also showing growing interest in land-use systems capable of generating measurable environmental outcomes alongside long-term economic value.

At the same time, the transition challenges established systems and incentives. Many agricultural support systems, machinery markets, advisory services and value chains have evolved around specialised production systems. These actors may not necessarily oppose agroforestry, but they often face fewer incentives to change established practices and business models. As a result, institutional inertia can slow the transition even where agroforestry benefits are widely recognised. Monoculture systems benefit from decades of optimisation, standardisation and institutional familiarity. Many large-scale production systems are integrated into established value chains, specialised machinery markets, input supply networks, insurance products and export-oriented business models that reward economies of scale and operational efficiency. Existing support structures, advisory services and administrative systems have also largely evolved around these production models.

By contrast, agroforestry often requires longer planning horizons, additional management skills, upfront investment , and greater coordination across agricultural, forestry, and environmental administrations. It may also involve changes in farm operations, monitoring requirements and market

relationships. These characteristics can make agroforestry appear more complex and uncertain than established production models, even where its long-term benefits are recognised.

The underperformance of previous CAP agroforestry measures illustrates these transition dynamics. Support instruments existed, yet uptake remained limited because many farmers and land managers perceived the transition as involving higher risks, greater complexity and less predictable returns. This suggests that scaling agroforestry also involves creating enabling conditions that make the transition economically attractive, institutionally feasible, and operationally manageable.

The transition also raises questions about the distribution of costs and benefits. Small and medium-sized farms often face greater difficulties in absorbing establishment costs, managing delayed returns and meeting monitoring requirements. Larger commercial farms may be reluctant to adopt practices perceived as increasing management complexity or reducing operational efficiency. Public administrations face the challenge of integrating agroforestry into existing payment, monitoring , and reporting systems, while private-sector actors may only engage when environmental outcomes can be measured and linked to credible business value.

Building effective reform coalitions will therefore be essential. Agroforestry is unlikely to scale through agricultural policy alone. Progress will require cooperation among farmers, advisory services, researchers, public authorities, financial institutions, food companies, and civil society organisations. The post-2027 CAP can play a key role by aligning incentives, reducing administrative barriers, and creating clearer links between public support, ecosystem service delivery, and private investment.

These transition dynamics have important implications for policy design. If agroforestry is presented primarily as an environmental obligation, resistance is likely to remain high. Framing it as a strategic investment in resilience, competitiveness, food security, climate adaptation, and risk reduction creates stronger incentives for farmers, administrations, value-chain actors, and investors to engage in the transition.

Box 2. Three Priorities for the Post-2027 CAP

While the recommendations presented in this brief address different aspects of agroforestry implementation, three priorities should guide the design of the post-2027 CAP.

Make agroforestry measurable

Agroforestry must become visible within CAP governance, monitoring and reporting systems. A common EU framework, with flexibility to account for regional ecological and agronomic conditions, is needed to consistently identify agroforestry while avoiding rigid one-size-fits-all definitions. Improved integration within LPIS/IACS and interoperable indicators would allow agroforestry to be monitored and rewarded more effectively across Member States. Better measurement is also a prerequisite for results-based payments, carbon farming, biodiversity finance, and sustainable investment.

Simplify and stabilise support

Farmers need clear, predictable and accessible support throughout the transition period. Eligibility rules should be simplified, administrative burdens reduced , and advisory services strengthened. At

the same time, agroforestry requires stable multiannual support and protected transition funding, as many benefits materialise only over longer time horizons. Flexibility for Member States should therefore be balanced with common EU safeguards and minimum implementation standards. **Make implementation workable** Digitalisation, monitoring and results-based approaches should reduce transaction costs rather than create new barriers. MRV systems, digital tools and reporting requirements must remain proportionate, affordable and supported by advisory services. Successful implementation will also depend on stronger cooperation between farmers, advisory services, public authorities, researchers, financial institutions, cooperatives and value-chain actors, ensuring that agroforestry becomes both operationally feasible and economically attractive.

Table 6: Box 1.Three Priorities for the Post-2027 CAP. Source: Authors' own elaboration

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy recommendations below build on the evidence reviewed above, as well as the ***ReForest Discussion Policy Papers*** developed in collaboration with ReForest Work Package leaders and insights gathered through two EMEA-led ***Policy Dialogues*** held in Brussels[27] and Barcelona[28]. These exchanges helped validate the main implementation challenges and translate project evidence into concrete and actionable recommendations for post-2027 CAP design.
Before turning to the targeted recommendations, three cross-cutting issues should guide agroforestry implementation under the post-2027 CAP.

First, digitalisation and modernisation should reduce transaction costs and improve access to support, rather than create new barriers for farmers with limited technical capacity. Older farmers, smallholders and regions with weaker advisory systems should not be disadvantaged by complex tools, reporting rules or performance-based schemes. Digital tools should therefore be usable, affordable and backed by human support. Agroforestry support should also consider labour demand, skills, and rural employment, so that the transition strengthens local capacity and social cohesion rather than widening regional disparities.

Second, the post-2027 CAP should preserve space for national and regional adaptation while protecting common EU standards. Member State flexibility can improve policy fit, but agroforestry support should not depend too heavily on national political priorities or uneven administrative capacity. The Commission should ensure that NRPPs include transparent needs assessments, stakeholder consultation, comparable indicators and minimum quality standards for environmental and climate interventions.

Third, flexibility should be matched with protected transition funding. Agroforestry-relevant climate, biodiversity, young farmer and small-farm measures require stable support because their benefits

often materialise over longer time horizons. Without safeguards, environmental and social priorities may lose out to short-term budget pressures or more visible income-support measures. Ring-fenced transition support would give farmers more predictable incentives, reduce implementation gaps across Member States , and help align CAP spending with climate, biodiversity , and rural development objectives.

Building on these considerations, the following eight recommendations focus on the main areas where changes to governance, funding, monitoring and implementation could improve agroforestry uptake across Member States.

1. **Make agroforestry measurable in CAP systems**

Agroforestry remains difficult to monitor, compare and support because definitions and reporting systems vary across Member States. Inconsistent recording across LPIS/IACS, forest inventories, remote sensing systems, biodiversity monitoring frameworks and LULUCF reporting reduces policy transparency, complicates CAP implementation and limits the development of results-based payments, carbon farming and sustainable finance. The post-2027 CAP should establish a coherent and interoperable framework for identifying, recording , and monitoring agroforestry systems, ensuring they are visible across administrative, reporting, and certification systems while remaining adaptable to regional contexts.

Level	EU + Member States
Lead institutions	- European Commission (DG AGRI, DG ENV, Joint Research Centre) - Paying agencies (national/regional) - LPIS/IACS authorities, Eurostat/LULUCF reporting bodies
Key actions	- The EU should adopt a common framework definition with flexible regional adaptation, based on shared measurable criteria (e.g., tree density, land-use interaction, land management practices), ensuring EU-wide comparability while allowing ecological and agronomic adaptation at national and regional level - Adopt a common EU agroforestry classification framework with flexibility for regional adaptation, applicable across all CAP strategic plans and NRPP monitoring frameworks - Require Member States to explicitly identify agroforestry parcels in LPIS/IACS through a dedicated system flag, clearly distinguishing agroforestry from forest land, landscape features, and scattered-tree agricultural land - Include agroforestry as a standalone reporting category in CAP performance frameworks, with dedicated area and result indicators in annual monitoring reports - Ensure interoperability between CAP, LULUCF, CRCF, and biodiversity reporting systems through a harmonised classification and data-sharing framework coordinated by the Joint Research Centre
Expected benefits	- Creation of a harmonised EU agroforestry classification within LPIS/IACS systems - Mandatory and consistent reporting of agroforestry areas in Member State CAP Strategic/NRPP plans

	- Alignment of agroforestry definitions across CAP, LULUCF, CRCF, and biodiversity monitoring frameworks -Improved data quality for CAP performance assessment, climate reporting, and results-based payment systems
Main beneficiaries	- Farmers benefit from clearer eligibility rules, reduced risk of land misclassification, and improved access to CAP and climate-related payments - Member States and paying agencies benefit from more efficient verification, reduced administrative uncertainty, and improved reporting consistency - European Commission gains robust and comparable indicators for evaluating CAP environmental and climate performance - Investors and certification bodies gain reliable and standardised datasets for carbon accounting, biodiversity claims, and sustainable finance instruments

2. **Simplify and stabilise AF support under CAP**

Agroforestry requires upfront investment, while many benefits only materialise over longer time horizons. Farmers carry the early costs of design, planting, protection, labour, management adaptation and income foregone, while climate, biodiversity, soil and water benefits often emerge later and at the landscape scale. The post-2027 CAP should therefore provide predictable multiannual support for establishment, maintenance, restoration and transition costs, while reducing administrative burden through interoperable digital systems and the "report once, use multiple times" principle.

Level	EU framework CAP regulation and implementing rules with Member State delivery through CAP Strategic Plans and NRPPs
Lead institutions	-European Commission (DG AGRI) for design and approval of CAP interventions -National and regional managing authorities for programming and implementation -Paying agencies for payment execution and controls
Key actions	- Encourage Member States to include an agroforestry intervention under the Agri-Environmental and Climate Actions (AECA) and/or investment measures that combine establishment and maintenance support - Provide an EU-level guidance payment range to reduce excessive variation in support levels across Member States while allowing adaptation to local agro-ecological and cost conditions -Include early-stage support for years 0–5, such as a carbon farming and young farmers starter pack, when costs are high, and returns remain limited[29]. - Link support to the Digital Farm Passport or single digital farm record approach, integrating parcel data, agroforestry features, management

[29] European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF). (2025). An agroforestry carbon farming starter pack – to simplify and link agricultural tree-planting interventions. CAP Simplification Proposal from EURAF to DG AGRI. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15130431; Lawson, G., & Muraru, C. (EURAF). (2025). Agroforestry and Simplification of the CAP, Policy Briefing #70, Version 2. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15130516

	commitments, advisory plans, geo-tagged evidence, soil, carbon and biodiversity indicators, payment history and certification information[30]. - Ensure compatibility with carbon farming schemes, private finance instruments, FaST, EU-FarmBook, the EU CAP Network/EIP-AGRI ecosystem and the REFOREST Co-creation Platform, while keeping CAP baseline support stable and accessible[31].
Expected benefits	- Establishment and maintenance costs are covered through a predictable multiannual framework, reducing upfront investment risk for farmers and improving the economic viability of agroforestry systems under CAP support - More consistent implementation across Member States and improved transparency of agroforestry uptake in CAP monitoring systems - Increased policy efficiency by aligning public payments with ecosystem service delivery
Main beneficiaries	-Farmers benefit from direct coverage of establishment and maintenance costs and improved cash flow stability during the transition phase -Young farmers and new entrants benefit from lower financial and structural barriers to adopting long-term agroforestry systems -Member States and paying agencies benefit from a clearer programming structure, reduced administrative ambiguity, and improved uptake of environmental interventions -EU policy system benefits from stronger delivery of measurable climate and environmental outcomes through more stable and targeted CAP spending

3. **Make MRV workable for farmers**

MRV systems should enable access to payments and finance, not create another administrative barrier. If monitoring is too costly or complex, smaller farms risk being excluded from result-based payments, carbon farming and biodiversity finance. Monitoring requirements should therefore remain proportionate to farm size and project complexity. Public support should build collective MRV capacity in rural areas by funding farmer associations, cooperatives and producer organisations to act as intermediaries, pool technical expertise, reduce verification costs, support access to certification schemes and connect agroforestry outcomes with carbon, biodiversity and sustainable value-chain

[30] See: European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF). (2025). An agroforestry carbon farming starter pack – to simplify and link agricultural tree-planting interventions. CAP Simplification Proposal from EURAF to DG AGRI. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15130431; Lawson, G., & Muraru, C. (EURAF). (2025). Agroforestry and Simplification of the CAP, Policy Briefing #70, Version 2. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15130516

[31] FaST Platform: https://fastplatform.eu/; EU-FarmBook: https://welcome.eufarmbook.eu/; EU CAP Network, Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/support/innovation-knowledge-exchange-eip-agri_en; EU CAP Network, EU-FarmBook project page: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/projects/eu-farmbook_en; REFOREST, The REFOREST Co-creation and Engagement Platform has been launched: https://agroReForest.eu/es/the-ReForest-co-creation-and-engagement-platform-has-been-launched/

opportunities[32].

Level	EU framework with Member State implementation under CAP Strategic Plans and NRPPs
Lead institutions	-European Commission (DG AGRI for CAP implementation, DG CLIMA for climate alignment, Joint Research Centre for MRV methods and interoperability tools) - National and regional managing authorities and CAP paying agencies (implementation, controls, and data management) - Farmer organisations, cooperatives, and producer organisations (collective MRV service delivery and farm-level data collection) - Accredited verification bodies under CRCF and related EU certification frameworks (independent validation and assurance)
Key actions	- Develop a tiered MRV system distinguishing between small, medium, and large farms and projects with proportionate monitoring requirements - Recognise and support cooperatives and producer organisations as MRV intermediaries providing shared monitoring, data collection and reporting services - Pool technical expertise, data collection and verification services to reduce costs. - Ensure interoperability between CAP MRV systems, CRCF carbon farming frameworks, and biodiversity monitoring systems - Develop EU-wide MRV guidance and interoperable digital templates and tools for Member State implementation, supported by the Joint Research Centre - Ensure that digital MRV tools are transparent, explainable and supported by clear rules on data ownership, privacy and farmer consent
Expected benefits	- Lower monitoring and verification costs, particularly for small and medium-sized farms - Increased participation in carbon farming and results-based payment schemes - More consistent, comparable and reliable MRV data across Member States - Reduced administrative burden for farmers, paying agencies and certification bodies
Main beneficiaries	- Farmers gain simpler reporting and better access to ecosystem-service payments. - Small and medium-sized farms gain fairer access to carbon and biodiversity finance. - Cooperatives and producer organisations gain a formal role in MRV delivery. - Member States gain more efficient MRV systems and better implementation data.

[32] This recommendation draws on Zibecchi, T., & Simonson, W. (2026). Discussion Policy Paper #6: Digital Infrastructure, Data Governance and Decentralised Innovation for Agroforestry. Horizon Europe Project 101060635 – REFOREST.

	- EU institutions gain harmonised environmental performance data for policy evaluation and climate reporting.

4. **Strengthen agroforestry advisory services, AKIS capacity and digital decision-support**

Agroforestry adoption remains constrained by limited technical knowledge, uneven advisory support and inconsistent interpretation of CAP eligibility rules across Member States. Advisory services should therefore be recognised as core delivery infrastructure for the post-2027 CAP, not as a complementary support measure. As environmental payments become more outcome-oriented, farmers will need integrated support for agroforestry design, financial planning, regulatory compliance, carbon accounting, biodiversity monitoring and performance verification. The post-2027 CAP should strengthen agroforestry advisory services within AKIS and connect them with trusted digital tools, including FarmTree-type modelling, carbon and biodiversity estimators, digital twins and decision-support platforms. These tools can support system design, investment planning, MRV and long-term management by helping farmers compare options, assess trade-offs and simulate future production, climate and ecosystem-service outcomes[33].

Level	EU framework under CAP Strategic Plans and AKIS coordination, implemented at the national and regional levels
Lead institutions	- European Commission DG AGRI (AKIS guidance and CAP programming requirements) - National managing authorities (AKIS design, funding allocation and monitoring) - National and regional advisory services and AKIS networks (delivery) - EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and Living Labs (innovation and testing)
Key actions	- Encourage Member States to develop or strengthen dedicated agroforestry advisory services within AKIS structures, based on national needs and capacities - Support Member States in establishing agroforestry demonstration farms and Living Labs within AKIS systems to provide practical, locally adapted evidence - Promote structured farmer-to-farmer learning and cooperative advisory models focused on agroforestry design, establishment, and management - Develop and promote common EU training modules for advisors and paying agencies on agroforestry design, eligibility rules, and CAP implementation - Integrate agroforestry into agricultural education and training programmes - Facilitate access to trusted digital tools, for example, FarmTree-type modelling, carbon and biodiversity estimators, digital twins and decision-support platforms.
Expected benefits	- Improved access for farmers to practical, implementation-oriented knowledge - More consistent interpretation of CAP eligibility rules across Member States - Faster uptake of agroforestry through applied learning and demonstration-based evidence

[33] This recommendation draws on Zibecchi, T., & Staton, T. (2026). Discussion Policy Paper #3: Advisory Services as Implementation Infrastructure for Agroforestry Transition. Horizon Europe Project 101060635 – REFOREST.

	- Strengthened administrative capacity for CAP implementation, eligibility verification and monitoring - Improved coordination between research, advisory services and on-farm application
Main beneficiaries	- Farmers through improved access to technical and advisory support for agroforestry implementation - Member States should implement agroforestry measures more consistently and reduce administrative complexity - Advisory organisations and AKIS networks through strengthened roles in long-term knowledge delivery and agroforestry support systems - Paying agencies and public administrations through improved capacity for eligibility assessment, monitoring, and implementation of agroforestry measures

5. **Align AF with sustainable finance and corporate reporting**

Agroforestry indicators should be linked to CRCF, CSRD, EU Taxonomy, and result-based payment frameworks, so that companies, investors, and value-chain actors can recognise agroforestry in carbon accounting, Scope 3 strategies, biodiversity claims, and sustainable finance. This would improve coherence between agricultural policy, sustainable finance and corporate reporting frameworks, while creating clearer pathways for private co-finance and ecosystem-service remuneration. Public authorities should also provide guidance and public-private platforms that demonstrate the economic case for value-chain actors to support agroforestry through insetting, long-term sourcing contracts, technical assistance, and resilience partnerships.

Level	EU sustainable finance, corporate reporting and CAP framework, with implementation through national CAP Strategic Plans, CRCF certification schemes, company reporting systems, value-chain contracts and private finance instruments.
Lead institutions	European Commission (DG AGRI, DG CLIMA, DG ENV, DG FISMA); EFRAG and reporting bodies; national managing authorities and paying agencies; certification bodies, MRV providers and registries; agri-food companies, retailers, processors, cooperatives and financial institutions.
Key actions	-Provide guidance for companies on credible agroforestry insetting, Scope 3 strategies, biodiversity claims and long-term sourcing contracts -Align MRV requirements across public payments, carbon farming, biodiversity monitoring and corporate reporting, while keeping them proportionate for farmers and SMEs -Create public-private platforms that connect farmers, cooperatives, companies, investors and public authorities around agroforestry investment opportunities - Encourage financial institutions to recognise verified agroforestry outcomes in farm resilience, transition finance and risk assessment -Promote contract models that ensure fair farmer value capture, transparent pricing, data rights and long-term commitments from value-chain actors

Expected benefits	-Improved recognition of agroforestry within sustainable finance and corporate reporting frameworks -Stronger incentives for private co-finance alongside CAP and public support -More credible carbon, biodiversity and ecosystem-service claims linked to verified farm-level outcomes -Reduced risk of double-counting, weak claims or fragmented MRV systems -Improved bankability of agroforestry projects through clearer links between ecosystem services, resilience and financial value -Greater supply-chain investment in landscape resilience, climate adaptation and biodiversity restoration
Main beneficiaries	-Farmers and land managers, through new revenue opportunities, stronger contracts and better recognition of ecosystem-service delivery -Agri-food companies, retailers and processors, through more resilient supply chains and credible sustainability strategies -Financial institutions and investors, through clearer agroforestry indicators, improved risk assessment and stronger transition-finance opportunities -Member States and paying agencies, through better alignment between CAP support, result-based payments and private finance - The EU policy system gains stronger coherence between agricultural policy, sustainable finance, corporate reporting and climate-biodiversity objectives

6. **Address land-tenure, tree-ownership and eligibility barriers**

Unclear land-tenure rules, tree-ownership rights and CAP eligibility conditions remain major barriers to agroforestry investment, especially for tenant farmers, smallholders, fragmented holdings and mixed land-use farms. Agroforestry requires long-term planning, while benefits often arrive years after establishment. If farmers are unsure whether they will retain land access, capture future returns, keep CAP payment eligibility or own/manage planted trees, they may decide not to invest. The post-2027 CAP should support clearer legal and administrative frameworks, while ensuring that planted trees do not reduce CAP support where agricultural use is maintained.

Level	EU framework guidance with implementation through CAP Strategic Plans and national administrative and land eligibility rules
Lead institutions	- European Commission (DG AGRI and DG ENV) (CAP framework guidance) - National managing authorities and paying agencies (CAP implementation, eligibility rules, and payment administration) - National ministries of agriculture, justice and land administration (land tenure regulation, legal frameworks, and contractual rules for land use) - Land registry and cadastral authorities (land parcel data, classification, and registration systems supporting eligibility verification)
Key actions	-Encourage Member States to clarify tree ownership rights and management responsibilities within tenancy and land-use rules for agroforestry systems - Address agroforestry-related tenure and eligibility barriers within CAP Strategic Plans and national administrative frameworks

	- Allow CAP payments for tenants under clearly defined agroforestry contracts that specify land-use rights, tree ownership and management responsibilities - Encourage agroforestry support and tenancy contracts to reflect establishment periods, management requirements and delayed returns, including through longer contractual periods where appropriate - Ensure that trees planted within agroforestry systems do not automatically change land classification or reduce CAP payment eligibility where agricultural use is maintained -Improve coordination between paying agencies, land registries and cadastral authorities to reduce disputes over eligibility, land classification and tree ownership
Expected benefits	- Reduced legal uncertainty and lower investment risk for farmers - Increased adoption of agroforestry on rented and fragmented land - Improved participation of tenants and smallholders in CAP environmental schemes - More stable long-term land management decisions through greater certainty over future rights and responsibilities. - Fewer disputes over CAP eligibility, land classification and tree ownership - More equitable agroforestry uptake across different farm types and regions
Main beneficiaries	- Tenant farmers and smallholders through improved access to CAP support and greater legal certainty over land use and tree management - Landowners through clearer contractual arrangements, reduced disputes and greater certainty over tree ownership, management responsibilities and future benefits. - Member States through clearer eligibility rules and reduced administrative conflicts in CAP implementation - EU policy system through more equitable and scalable agroforestry uptake across regions

7. **Develop spatial targeting and landscape-scale approaches**

Current agroforestry support is often allocated without systematically targeting areas where environmental and climate benefits would be greatest. This reduces the efficiency of public spending and limits the environmental benefits generated per euro of CAP expenditure. Post-2027 CAP implementation should integrate spatial targeting and needs-based planning so that agroforestry support reaches the farms and landscapes where environmental and socio-economic benefits are greatest.

Level	EU framework guidance with Member State implementation through CAP Strategic Plans and NRPPs
Lead institutions	- European Commission (DG AGRI and DG ENV) (policy design and CAP framework coordination) - Joint Research Centre (spatial modelling, data integration, and methodological support)

	- National managing authorities (design and implementation of national CAP implementation frameworks, including targeting, eligibility rules, and allocation of support) - Environmental agencies and land planning authorities (regional spatial planning and implementation)
Key actions	- Strongly encourage Member States to identify priority areas for agroforestry implementation in CAP Strategic Plans - Integrate spatial indicators (e.g. erosion risk, water stress, biodiversity value) into targeting and eligibility criteria -Use LPIS/IACS and remote sensing data to support landscape-scale planning - Promote territorial and landscape-scale agroforestry approaches coordinated across groups of farms and regions - Allow higher payment rates or bonus payments in areas where agroforestry delivers high environmental priorities (e.g., climate, biodiversity, water management)
Expected benefits	-More efficient use of CAP funds based on environmental priorities -Higher climate, biodiversity and soil protection benefits per euro of CAP expenditure -Greater landscape connectivity and reduced fragmentation of agroforestry systems -Improved coherence between agricultural and environmental policy objectives
Main beneficiaries	- Rural landscapes and ecosystems through improved biodiversity, soil protection, water regulation and climate resilience. - Farmers in priority areas receive more targeted and better-aligned financial support - Member States through the more efficient allocation of CAP resources and improved policy targeting

8. **Leverage cooperatives and collective models**

Use cooperatives, producer organisations and local partnerships to aggregate small projects, reduce transaction costs, pool technical capacity and improve access to markets, finance and certification schemes. Many agroforestry projects are too small to access carbon markets, biodiversity finance or corporate sourcing arrangements individually. Collective models can reduce fixed costs, improve bargaining power and create regional spillovers through shared processing, logistics, advisory services and local value chains.

Level	EU framework guidance under CAP Strategic Plans, implemented through national and regional rural development measures, producer organisation support, cooperative policy and local development instruments.
Lead institutions	European Commission (DG AGRI); national managing authorities and paying agencies; regional authorities and local development agencies; cooperatives, producer organisations and farmer associations; EIP-AGRI Operational Groups,

	Living Labs and advisory networks; agri-food companies, processors, retailers and financial institutions
Key actions	- Provide financial and advisory support to cooperatives and farmer groups to aggregate projects, reduce costs, and access markets and certification -Use CAP and rural development measures to finance shared advisory services, processing facilities, storage, logistics and certification costs -Encourage collective access to carbon farming, biodiversity payments, nature credits and result-based schemes where individual farm participation would be too costly -Promote local and regional value chains for agroforestry products through branding, public procurement, short supply chains and buyer partnerships -Develop cooperative models for shared machinery, tree management, MRV, data collection and market development -Facilitate partnerships between farmers, advisors, municipalities, processors, retailers and financial institutions to support agroforestry at the landscape scale
Expected benefits	-Lower transaction costs for farmers and public administrations -Better access for smallholders and fragmented farms to finance, certification and market opportunities -Stronger bargaining power for farmers in value-chain and ecosystem-service contracts -Improved access to shared infrastructure, advisory services and technical capacity -Greater regional spillovers through local processing, employment, skills development and rural value creation -More scalable implementation of agroforestry across landscapes rather than isolated farms
Main beneficiaries	-Smallholders, tenant farmers and fragmented farms, through lower entry barriers and shared support systems -Cooperatives, producer organisations and farmer associations, through stronger roles in aggregation, advisory delivery and market access -Rural communities, through local employment, processing, logistics and value-chain development -Member States and regional authorities, through more efficient implementation and monitoring of agroforestry measures -Agri-food companies and buyers, through more reliable supply, clearer sourcing arrangements and stronger landscape-level sustainability outcomes

6. CONCLUSION

Agroforestry is already recognised in EU policy for its contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, soil health, water resilience and rural development. Yet this recognition has not been matched by implementation at scale. This brief shows that agroforestry remains weakly

embedded in the systems that shape CAP delivery, including definitions, eligibility rules, funding channels, advisory services, monitoring frameworks and administrative data.

Evidence from ReForest, supported by scientific literature, stakeholder consultations, institutional analyses, Discussion Policy Papers and EMEA-led Policy Dialogues in Brussels and Barcelona, points to a consistent set of challenges. These include regulatory fragmentation, heterogeneous definitions and eligibility rules, limited access to suitable finance, land-tenure constraints, weak advisory systems, administrative complexity, costly monitoring requirements and uneven implementation across Member States. These barriers often reinforce one another, creating a situation in which agroforestry is formally recognised in policy but remains difficult to establish, manage and finance in practice.

The post-2027 CAP offers an opportunity to address these gaps, provided agroforestry is treated as an implementation priority rather than solely as an eligible practice. Agri-Environmental and Climate Actions, investment support, AKIS, advisory services, digital tools, data governance and results-based approaches all provide potential entry points. To be effective, they need clear definitions, stable support, proportionate monitoring, advisory capacity and safeguards that preserve environmental and social ambition across Member States.

The recommendations set out in this brief respond directly to these needs. They aim to increase the visibility of agroforestry within CAP systems, improve its programmability and accessibility, reduce monitoring and administrative costs, strengthen advisory and digital support, and better connect agroforestry to sustainable finance, value chains, and collective models. They also address structural barriers to uptake, including land tenure uncertainty, tree ownership rules, payment eligibility, fragmented farm structures, and weak spatial targeting.

For the post-2027 CAP, this means integrating agroforestry into implementation systems that are usable in practice for farmers, administrations, and value-chain actors. Support should be sufficiently clear to programme, stable enough to encourage investment, simple enough to access and measurable enough to demonstrate climate, biodiversity and rural-development outcomes. In this context, agroforestry should be framed as a strategic investment in the resilience, competitiveness and long-term sustainability of European agriculture.

7. APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

ID	Reference or Related Document	Source or Link/Location
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