The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL)
It is the mandate of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture to safeguard our basic resources and our quality of life. It is a “Ministry of Life”.

Whether in the city or in the countryside: The provision of high-quality, safe and healthy foods produced under fair and sustainable conditions is of great importance to all of us. People in Germany want their daily food and drink to meet high standards. And rightly so, which is why high standards must be met on the way from the field to the fork, both in Germany and throughout the European Union. Our food is safer than ever before but at the same time we have to be prepared. Food safety always takes top priority.

Our foodstuffs are basic means of life. Too much food ends up in the waste bin. The proper stewardship of our „daily bread“ is a value in itself. We are cooperating with consumers, producers, retailers and representatives of civil society to develop strategies to prevent this waste.

The agricultural sector is not just a defining feature of our rural areas; it is also an integral part of all our lives. It is at the heart of our society. Farmers ensure that we have food to eat, care for large parts of our countryside and create jobs far from major conurbations. We advocate maintaining a competitive and sustainable agricultural sector.
The cultivation of renewable resources also offers great potential as a source of energy for the future. As the Ministry of Life we also ensure that there are optimal conditions for forestry and fisheries.

Life in Germany is largely rural. Every second inhabitant lives in the country. This is why it is important that we make and keep our rural areas fit for the future. We are facing huge challenges. Using land in a manner that is compatible with nature and ecology, dealing with demographic change, securing jobs and providing services of general interest are important tasks which we tackle together with our partners at federal and Länder level.

Dear readers, the range of topics at the Ministry of Life is diverse and of fundamental importance. In this brochure I would like to give you an outline of the Ministry’s remit and our policy aims. If you wish to find out more about the work of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture please visit our website www.bmel.de.

Your

Christian Schmidt
Member of the German Bundestag
Federal Minister of Food and Agriculture
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A healthy diet
Healthy food is a pleasure, but also plays a cultural role: having meals together can make the healthy enjoyment of food become a normal part of everyday life and also provide an opportunity for talking with family or friends. Meals promote communication and enrich our lives.

But a healthy and balanced diet is also the best recipe for good health. What we eat and drink also has an influence on our well-being and physical and mental abilities. Nutrition and physical activity are inherently linked. If you lead a physically active life, you consume more energy.

The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) has launched a National Action Plan entitled “IN FORM – German national initiative to promote healthy diets and physical activity” that is scheduled to run until 2020; its aim is to encourage people to live healthy lives and eat safe, high-quality foods.
IN FORM pools together projects on healthy lifestyles from across Germany, creates support structures and provides information on good dietary practices for all spheres of life – from nutrition for children at school and pre-school to balanced diets for women during pregnancy, people at work and the elderly. Through the action plan, the BMEL wishes to ensure that children grow up more healthily, adults live more healthily, and all benefit from a higher quality of life and better physical and mental ability in education, jobs and private lives.

The German food industry is moreover one of our country’s most innovative and productive economic sectors. “Made in Germany” stands for internationally acclaimed quality and a huge variety of products, particularly in the food sector, providing consumers in Germany with a wide range of high-quality and healthy foods to choose from.
Safe food, safe products
Safe food, safe products
One of the Ministry's main tasks is to protect consumer health through safe, high-quality foods and products. New products and ingredients that enter the market must, like all products in the production chains, adhere to high standards. The BMEL constantly faces new challenges due to a wide range of factors, such as constant developments in production, the occurrence of disease-carrying organisms and changing eating habits among consumers. The aim is to balance consumer demands for safe, high-quality foods with the economic interests of producers and the retail sector. Top priority is, however, given to ensuring that foods are safe; this is preventive consumer protection and takes precedence over economic interests.

Foods are increasingly part of global trade. International standards and a pan-European system for monitoring food safety (RASFF) have been established in order to ensure that food is safe. The BMEL and its subordinate authorities ensure that risks are continuously assessed and that standards and structures are constantly brought into line with new findings. This takes place in close consultation with the Länder. Their job is to monitor food and the markets.
The Product Safety Act (ProdSG), type approval marks, certification marks and the “RAPEX” rapid alert system ensure that there is also a high level of protection in respect of consumer products such as toys and cosmetics. These legal provisions commit manufacturers and importers to compliance with comprehensive information and identification duties and consequently ensure that only safe products are marketed. The “RAPEX” rapid alert system, on the other hand, takes effect in respect of products already on the market. It enables the authorities to detect faulty products such as spark-emitting power sockets, toys with sharp corners and edges etc. and remove them from the market before they cause injury or damage. Consumers can tell from approval marks and stamps that a product has passed a particular safety check. The GS approval mark (with “GS” standing for “geprüfte Sicherheit” or “tested safety”) on toys or technical devices is widely known. These mechanisms and regulations prevent harmful products from appearing on the market and at the same time also ensure that dangerous products are withdrawn from the market.
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Transparent labelling
To enable consumers to make well-informed decisions when buying their food, the product should allow them to see the most important food information at a glance. Packaging therefore bears a number of compulsory labels, usually based on EU legislation.

The European legal environment is adapted continuously to reflect new developments. For instance, the EU’s so-called “Food Information Regulation” contains a series of new labelling rules, most of which will become effective from 13 December 2014. For example they prescribe a minimum print size, require that imitation foods and so-called mechanically separated meat must be identified as such more clearly, prescribe that allergenic substances are optically highlighted in the list of ingredients, and make allergen labelling compulsory for unpacked food as well as for packed food. From 13 December 2016, the packaging on industrially packed foodstuffs must also display a nutritional information panel.
It will also be possible to provide voluntary information on foods; such information may be subject to standardising or restrictive regulations. Logos and stamps offer voluntary additional information on the manufacture or special features of the products. One such example for voluntary labelling is the German regional label, which states the origin of the agricultural ingredients used and the place in which the product was processed. As a growing number of consumers attach importance to supporting the agricultural sector in their region and safeguarding local jobs, and also pay regard to shorter transport routes and consequently greater climate protection in deciding on what to buy, the BMEL welcomes the fact that consumers are now better able to recognise regional products when shopping. The regional label enables consumers to tell at a glance what foodstuffs actually come from the region indicated on the packaging. A neutral control system ensures that the information on the regional label is correct. The regional label also provides support for manufacturers. It gives them the option of setting themselves apart from other suppliers or initiatives and of credibly proving the added value that their products provide to customers.

As consumers often regard food labelling as being fragmented and patchy in respect of genetic engineering and animal welfare, and as there is not yet a pan-European regulation on certain issues, the Federal Ministry has encouraged and supported voluntary labelling. The “without genetic engineering” label, for example, enables consumers to see whether animal products originate from animals whose feed was free from genetically modified ingredients. The “animal welfare label” denotes products that originate from animals which experienced significantly higher levels of animal welfare, for example in the way in which they were kept. Consumers can then see at a glance when a product was made in compliance with animal welfare standards that were significantly higher than the minimum legal requirements. At the same time the BMEL speaks out emphatically in support of having a harmonised rule at EU level.
A strong agricultural sector
A strong agricultural sector
Fields, meadows and pastures are typical features of the landscape in many areas of Germany. More than half of Germany’s national territory is used for farming. Around 1 million people currently work full-time or part-time in approximately 285,000 agricultural holdings. And more than 34,500 young people are training to work in green professions. Agriculture is consequently an important employer and a backbone of our rural regions. Sustainable agriculture is the foundation for protecting natural resources – soil, water and air – and for maintaining biodiversity. Protecting these natural resources is one of the ministry’s core duties. As well as conserving these resources, the ministry focuses on the fields of breeding, seed multiplication, plant variety protection, adapted fertilisation and plant protection measures, in order to meet the requirements of a modern agricultural sector.

The BMEL devotes a great deal of attention to welfare-oriented animal husbandry. To this end, the legislator has drawn up a large number of requirements for the breeding, husbandry, medical treatment, transport and slaughter of animals. They aim to ensure that animals are kept in accordance with their needs and that they are spared unnecessary suffering and environmental strain. When farmers keep their animals in conditions that greatly exceed minimum statutory requirements,
products originating from these animals are permitted to bear the animal welfare label initiated and promoted by the BMEL. In addition to legislation governing animal welfare and environmental protection, consumer expectations, which have risen greatly in recent years, and general economic conditions also exert a great influence on animal husbandry. The BMEL offers a number of different financial assistance options to support science and industry in developing husbandry methods that bring about improvements in animal welfare, environmental impact, occupational health and safety, and competitiveness.

The German agricultural sector has a reputation for producing high-quality foodstuffs. The growing world population and the increasing need for high-quality foods, such as meat and dairy products, means that global demand will continue to rise. Germany’s domestic farming sector already earns a quarter of its revenue indirectly, via exports; for food manufacturers, it is even a third. Without support, enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, often do not have the access required to tap into the huge potential of high-revenue foreign markets. The BMEL has therefore launched a programme offering support to the agri-food sector in important target countries, including via involvement in trade fairs.
Farmers now increasingly play a role as suppliers of raw materials for the non-food sector. With the EU and Germany’s ambitious policy objectives in climate and resource protection, and with rising energy prices, the sustainable use of regenerative energy sources is providing new opportunities for the agricultural sector. Germany’s agricultural sector is now an important producer for the bioenergy industry. Renewable resources are also in demand as materials for the chemical industry. Around two million hectares of arable land in Germany are currently used for the cultivation of renewable resources, thereby tapping into innovation potential, replacing fossil resources, creating new jobs and securing income in rural regions. As with all entrepreneurs, farmers need planning security to be able to perform all these tasks. Preserving the diversity and quality of our foods, producing renewable resources, engaging in welfare-oriented husbandry and making farming sustainable all require investments to be made to modernise farms. The Federal Ministry aims to creating optimal conditions to enable the German agricultural industry to be modern, multi-functional and innovative.

One core element is the 2014 reform of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The support funds provided by the EU are divided across two pillars. Direct payments to farmers (1st
pillar) are linked to the farmers undertaking environmental measures. This consequently supports the agricultural sector in rendering services for the climate, for the preservation of diverse cultivated landscapes, and for sustainable production, and as a result leads Europe’s agricultural sector becoming more ecological. To provide this support, Germany has annual EU funds of approximately 4.8 billion Euros at its disposal up until 2020. The so-called 2nd pillar supports programmes of action for rural development. This money consequently benefits the regions first and foremost.

The BMEL’s agricultural social security policy flanks structural change in the agricultural sector and provides a stable foundation for giving due consideration to the social affairs of farmers and their families. Agricultural social security policy is also a creative, target-oriented policy for the benefit of active farmers and retired farmers still living on their farms, and consequently part of rural development policy. With this support, the agricultural social security system provides farmers and their families with financial protection against the vicissitudes of life (illness, need for long-term care, work-related accidents, reduction in earning capacity, old age and death of the insured person). Absorbing the financial impact of structural change is the responsibility of society as a whole and ensures that the country retains a productive agricultural sector. This is why the federal government provides financial aid under its agricultural social policy (around EUR 3.7 billion in 2014).
Sustainable fisheries and marine conservation
Fishing is a traditional industry in the coastal regions of Germany and also in inland areas. The total volume of fish and fishery products in 2012 amounted to 2.1 million tonnes. More than 40,000 people work in this sector, supplying consumers with high-quality fishery products from oceans, rivers, lakes and ponds.

Sustainable use of our global fish stocks is more important today than ever before, ensuring that future generations will also be able to be supplied with fish, a high-quality and healthy food. The resolutions on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy that were passed in late 2013 firmly anchored the principle of sustainability in the EU’s fisheries policy. The aim is to make step-by-step progress towards managing fish stocks according to the principle of the maximum sustainable yield; this is to be achieved for all fish stocks if possible by 2015, and at the latest by 2020. The scientifically-based multi-annual plans for the different fisheries form the main part of the scheme. By 2019 there will be a general ban on discards, meaning that all fish caught, insofar as the respective species is subject to fishery regulations, must be landed even if this is unprofitable for the
fisher. This will put an end to the irresponsible wastage of marine resources. The measures will be flanked by effective fisheries control and the rigorous combating of illegal fishing. Germany has already adjusted fishing capacities to available resources. Consumers are becoming more critical and are asking about the origin of the fish, about the production techniques and catching methods used, and about fisheries management. The Federal Government expressly supports the introduction of certification systems for sustainable fisheries, such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

Alongside sea fisheries, inland fishing (including aquaculture) also plays an important role for the fishing industry, with around 6,100 enterprises which employ almost 21,000 employees. Eighty percent of the fish produced in Germany comes from aquaculture, the fishing sector with the greatest potential for growth. Twenty percent is supplied by traditional river and lake fisheries. In addition to professional fishermen, more than 1.5 million recreational fishermen use and manage Germany’s water bodies.
Valuable and diverse forests
One third of Germany is covered in forests. Over two million forest owners in Germany are responsible for the sustainable management of the forests. Forests play a very important role for the climate, air, water and soil, as a habitat for a variety of flora and fauna, and as a highly valued environment in which to relax, exercise and enjoy nature. The forests also supply wood, an environmentally friendly raw material. The sustainable management of our forests, and the use of domestic timber, is the foundation for sawmills, carpenters and joiners. Wood is also increasingly being used for energy generation. Overall, around 1.2 million people work in forestry and wood-based industries.
The Federal Forest Act is the main basis for forest conservation and sustainable forestry. Together with the Federal Government’s Forest Strategy 2020, it ensures that forests and the benefits they provide for nature and environment will continue to be conserved. The Forest Strategy 2020 views forests as a natural and economic environment and focuses on challenges in nine action areas, namely climate stewardship, ownership, the supply of raw materials, biodiversity, silviculture, hunting, soil protection, recreation and research. The objective is to show ways of achieving a viable balance between the growing demands on forests and their sustainable productivity. The National Forest Inventory and the Forest Soil Condition Survey are used to observe the development of Germany’s forests and to provide regular monitoring of the sustainability of forest use. It can be seen that the area of land covered by forests, the diversity of the forests, and the timber reserves have all been increasing for decades.
Attractive rural regions
About 90 percent of Germany’s territory is classified as comprising rural areas. More than half Germany’s population live in villages and rural towns. “Living in the countryside” is, for many people, part of what contributes to their “quality of life”: far away from hectic city life, often with more reasonably-priced accommodation and more open space, amid natural countryside, and in communities with high levels of civic commitment and a good neighbourly atmosphere. Rural areas are, however, more than just a romantic idyll. As well as economically strong regions with good levels of growth, there are also structurally weak areas confronted with high levels of unemployment and the exodus of young people. Many rural areas are facing great challenges, not least due to demographic change. But it is also rural regions that contain the diversity, regional roots and innovative strength of many medium-sized companies and their staff.

The aim must be to make these regions fit for the future. This calls for new ideas in order to supplement tried-and-tested concepts with new developments. The BMEL provides support in this area with many different aid schemes, initiatives, model projects and competitions. However, all support schemes must always remain focused on the goals of quality of life, jobs and a healthy environment. Blanket access to broadband Internet, adapted transport and supply concepts, and a viable social infrastructure with pre-schools, schools and doctor’s surgeries are important prerequisites for this.
One example of the BMEL’s support is the national competition entitled “Our village has a future” (Unser Dorf hat Zukunft), which takes place every three years. Through this competition, the BMEL regularly succeeds in encouraging large number of people to show huge commitment for ensuring that rural areas remain attractive places to live. The villagers are called upon to work together with their local authority to develop and implement concepts and projects to make life in the village attractive. The competition focuses principally on the commitment of the village community to forging ahead with the overall development of the village. It is intended to show what goals the citizens have set for their village and how they were realised. The assessment does not concentrate on the condition of the village; instead, it is how the village has developed due to the efforts of the village community.

Rural areas are home to a huge percentage of the country’s biological diversity: eco-systems, flora and fauna, and also crops and livestock. The BMEL wishes to conserve this diversity, both in the interest of nature and our cultivated landscapes and also as a foundation for feeding people and for producing renewable raw materials.
The EU support for rural development (EAFRD support) provides an important basis for the funding of aid schemes in Germany. As the 2nd pillar of the CAP, Germany can use approximately 1.35 billion Euros of EU funds annually in the programming period 2014–2020. These EU funds, supplemented by national funds, serve to achieve a balanced development of rural areas and to contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources, to climate change mitigation, and to fostering a competitive agricultural sector.
The Federal Ministry wishes, via efficient and effective support, close collaboration between the federal government and the EU, Länder, districts, towns and local authorities, and not least via the citizens’ own local initiatives, to conserve the diversity of rural regions, foster their strengths, promote their economic power and support their social cohesion.
Support for global food security and international priority areas
The BMEL is committed to global food security, both at international level and in cooperation with partner countries. Approximately 870 million people currently suffer from hunger and chronic malnutrition.

The world population is growing and so too is the need for food. Other challenges facing global food security stem from:

→ the scarcity of natural resources such as water, soil, nutrients and fossil-based energy;
→ changes in consumer habits, in particular in emerging countries; and
→ the increase in production risks resulting from climate change and the growing competition for agricultural land.

The “global food supply” will remain an item on the international political agenda in the years to come. The use and protection of resources must be better balanced worldwide.

The BMEL represents Germany regarding issues of global food security in a large number of international organisations and bodies. The BMEL’s international commitment focuses on trade issues and on a sustainable raw materials policy built on clear, predictable rules that have been negotiated multilaterally. However, BMEL is also strongly committed to bilateral partnerships with agricultural research institutions in emerging and developing countries and contributes via these partnerships to developing efficient agricultural sectors in these countries.

One priority area is the support of FAO projects, including projects aimed at drawing up internationally recognised rules (e.g. safe and fair access to land) and developing policies and concepts for achieving food security, in particular in Africa and Afghanistan.

Via its bilateral cooperation programme on technical cooperation, the BMEL supports its partner countries in developing a productive and resource-efficient agri-food sector. The aim is to impart know-how, transfer knowledge and technology, and improve market conditions.
EU accession countries and potential accession countries are supported via the EU-funded Twinning scheme (partnership between authorities) in harmonising EU legislation and creating and optimising modern administration structures.

EU neighbours in the east and in the Mediterranean area can also use this partnership. In 2010, the BMEL expanded the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA), which takes place during the Green Week in Berlin, to include the Berlin Agriculture Ministers’ Summit, thereby establishing an annual international platform for agriculture ministers from throughout the world to discuss central issues of vital importance for the future of the global agri-food sector. The forum provides representatives from the worlds of business, science and civil society, as well as politics, with an opportunity to share ideas and enhance political understanding on selected topics of current agricultural policy within the context of food security.
Important innovations
Whether the subject is healthy and safe foods or sustainable agriculture and forestry: the range of educational and research topics addressed by the BMEL is broad and closely linked to the vital issues of the future, namely global food security, sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries, animal-welfare oriented husbandry, renewable resources, protection of biological diversity, resources and the climate.

A modern, successful agri-food policy depends on receiving advice from competent experts and on up-to-date scientific expertise. To this end the BMEL has approximately a dozen research-related authorities and research institutions in its remit. In 2013, the federal ministry spent 668 million Euros on science and research. The scientific institutions and research projects that receive financial support make a valuable contribution towards solving present and future challenges; the results of this research are of equal relevance to both consumers and industry.
The agri-food industry is, both nationally and internationally, subject to permanent structural change and ongoing development. Several of the Federal Ministry’s research institutions gather background information and interrelations and work on solutions and innovations. The BMEL also provides funds from specialised support schemes for research, innovation programmes and model and demonstration projects. These support the development of innovative, internationally competitive, sustainable and animal welfare-oriented products, methods and services based on up-to-date scientific evidence.

The programmes include the support of:

- research, development and demonstration projects aimed at making innovative technical and non-technical products marketable;
- projects aimed at increasing innovative strength, including knowledge transfer;
- tests on social and legal conditions for innovations and identification of future areas of innovation.
The Ministry
As a member of the federal government, Federal Minister Christian Schmidt is responsible for the focus of German agri-food policies and for food-related consumer protection. His remit also includes rural regions, forests and fisheries. Many of the duties and decisions are influenced by European and international responsibility. Federal Minister Christian Schmidt has been head of the BMEL since February 2014.

The Parliamentary State Secretaries Dr. Maria Flachsbarth and Peter Bleser ensure that there is an exchange of information between government and parliament. They represent the Federal Minister politically in the German Bundestag, the Bundesrat and the parliamentary groups.

The Permanent State Secretary Dr. Robert Kloos assists the Federal Minister in leading and managing the Ministry. As head of administration he is responsible for more than 900 members of staff at the BMEL in Bonn and Berlin. In addition, BMEL members of staff are seconded to German embassies and representations at the EU and in international organisations.

The BMEL receives expert scientific guidance from its departmental researchers in elaborating its food, agricultural, forestry, fisheries and rural-development policies. Supporting re-
search and innovation is a decisive prerequisites for solving problems of the future.

The institutions within the BMEL’s remit, employing approximately 5,000 members of staff, comprise:

→ higher federal authorities (Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety [BVL]; Federal Office of Plant Varieties [BSA]);
→ legally independent institutions (Federal Institute for Risk Assessment [BfR], Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food [BLE], German wine fund);
→ four federal research centres (Julius Kühn Institute, Julius Kühn-Institut – Federal Research Centre for Cultivated Plants [JKI]; Friedrich Loeffler Institute, Federal Research Institute for Animal Health [FLI]; Max Rubner Institute, Federal Research Institute of Nutrition and Food [MRI], and the Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute, Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries [TI]);
→ and recipients of institutional grants (e.g. German Biomass Research Centre [DBFZ]).
Our Services
More information on the BMEL’s activities can be found on the Internet at www.bmel.de. You can also download brochures and order any of a selection of publications from this site. The majority of our online publications are barrier-free. We would also be happy for you to visit us at trade fairs to find out about the BMEL's work and the topics it deals with.

The BMEL offers organised groups of ten to 50 people the option of visiting the offices of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Berlin and Bonn. Presentations (duration: approximately 90 minutes) on the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture’s duties and work can be booked for a time slot from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. on a working day (Monday to Friday, apart from on public holidays) and discussions on specialist political subjects can be booked with members of staff.

In cooperation with the Bundesrat, the BMEL also offers pupils the simulation game “Klasse! ins BMEL” in Berlin. The simulation game is based on a real legislative procedure and real interest groups, providing a realistic insight into the role and duties of a federal ministry and the Bundesrat in a legislative procedure.
Anyone wishing to register a visitor’s group or participate in the simulation game should submit a registration to the BMEL at least a month in advance of your planned visit via the form available online (www.bmel.de à ministry à Visitors’ Service). The date for the simulation game is then coordinated internally with the Bundesrat.

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