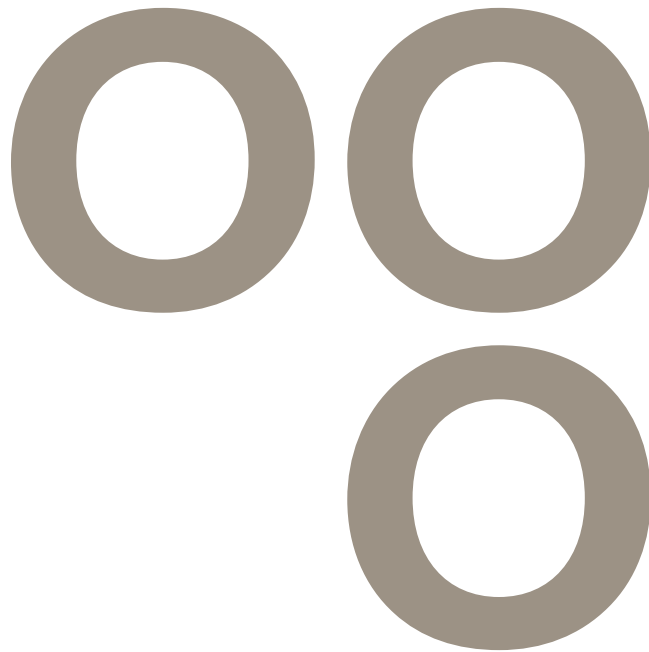


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# Biodiversity Guide of the Bell Food Group



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## 1. Responsibility of the Bell Food Group

The sustainability strategy is one of the pillars of the Bell Food Group's corporate activities. As part of its sustainability strategy, the Bell Food Group recognises its responsibility to preserve biodiversity and sets itself clear goals and ambitions along the entire value chain.

The purpose of this biodiversity policy is to define the values and positioning of Bell Food Group companies with regard to biodiversity and to demonstrate how biodiversity is potentially influenced by land use, in particular by agriculture and soil sealing. The Bell Food Group expects all business partners to be committed to the preservation of biodiversity and to comply with these principles with regard to biodiversity. The Bell Food Group offers the necessary assistance and support to preserve biodiversity along the entire value chain. The biodiversity policy is developed further on a regular basis. Progress is documented and communicated in the context of the achievement of sustainability targets.

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## 2. Scope

The biodiversity policy applies to all companies in the Bell Food Group in the areas of directly contracted production, procurement, processing and production. In particular, all product groups with plant-based products in unprocessed and any processed form are affected. The Bell Food Group also positions itself on biodiversity issues relating to the production of animal raw materials.

The biodiversity policy covers the entire value chain from breeding, cultivation, harvesting and transportation through to processing. The Bell Food Group is aware that, in addition to its own operations, its business activities also impact global biodiversity in upstream and downstream stages of the value chain. The company recognises its responsibility to protect biodiversity and has already observed this obligation in the past. The Bell Food Group will continue to fulfil its responsibility in future through a variety of initiatives, thus ensuring that it also contributes to the promotion of biodiversity within the supply chain.

The impact of animal breeding (including feed) on biodiversity is described in the animal welfare policy. This includes the Bell Food Group's position and approaches regarding animal welfare aspects and related environmental issues<sup>1</sup>.

The Bell Food Group regularly reviews the impact of its business activities on the environment and the protection of people in the supply chain. It endeavours to minimise undesirable effects. This process is explained in the Declaration on Human Rights of the Bell Food Group,<sup>2</sup> which describes how the Bell Food Group implements sustainable due diligence.

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## 3. Definition of biodiversity

Biodiversity means biological diversity or, more precisely, the variability evident among living organisms of any origin. We distinguish between the following:

- Genetic diversity
- Biodiversity
- Diversity of ecosystems

Genetic diversity contributes to the emergence of new species and makes existing species more resistant to sudden environmental changes. It is subject to natural changes through natural selection or environmental influences.

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<sup>1</sup> [Bell Food Group Animal welfare policy](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Declaration of Human Rights](#)

In biology, the term biodiversity refers to the number of biological species within a specific habitat or a geographically limited area. It has a major influence on genetic diversity, food, medicine and the economy.

Ecosystems consist of the interaction of habitat, populations of different species and climatic factors. They fulfil ecosystem services such as purifying drinking water and air, pollinating crops and breaking down waste.<sup>3</sup>

The basis for the protection of biodiversity is the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which was adopted and signed by 192 member states in 1993. Many countries and states (or associations of states), including Germany (2007), Switzerland (2012), Austria (2014) and the EU (2011), have now published official biodiversity strategies for the conservation of biodiversity.<sup>3,4</sup>

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## 4. Principles

- The Bell Food Group expects all partners to comply with legislation applicable in each respective country and, wherever possible, to go beyond the legal requirements when it comes to preserving biodiversity.
- The Bell Food Group promotes products that fulfil higher sustainability standards across its entire product range.
- The Bell Food Group endeavours to obtain GlobalG.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practice) or SwissG.A.P. certification for all its contracted producers of plant-based raw materials.
- The Bell Food Group specifically supports initiatives that promote biodiversity in the agricultural sector.
- The Bell Food Group promotes innovative projects to replace peat in fruit and vegetable cultivation and is pursuing the goal of peat-free production by 2030.
- The Bell Food Group requires that contracted suppliers of fruit and vegetables practise water management.
- The Bell Food Group is reducing its specific water consumption (volume of fresh water purchased) by 10 per cent by 2026 compared to the reference year 2021 and is endeavouring to increase the proportion of water reused and reduce the fresh water consumption of operations in risk areas where water is scarce by 50 per cent.
- The Bell Food Group endeavours to use animal feed, particularly soy and palm oil, from responsible sources (details can be found in the Animal Welfare Policy<sup>5</sup>).
- The Bell Food Group pursues the goal of deforestation-free and conversion-free supply chains. This is based on the Deforestation Fronts<sup>5</sup> and the Accountability Framework Initiative (AFI). The Bell Food Group expects its suppliers to use raw materials from deforestation-free and conversion-free supply chains.
- The Bell Food Group is pursuing the goal of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (absolute, Scope 1 and 2) by 21 per cent by 2026 when compared to the reference year of 2021. It promotes and implements innovative projects in the field of sustainability with a focus on reducing emissions / energy consumption in integrated production.
- Throughout its entire product range, the Bell Food Group refrains from using products from endangered species, inappropriate animal husbandry or products obtained in an inhumane and cruel manner. These are summarised in the Bell Food Group's so-called DON'TS list.<sup>6</sup>
- The Bell Food Group prohibits the procurement of fish and seafood from critically endangered species pursuant to the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature<sup>7</sup>), endeavouring to use a high proportion of fish and seafood that comes from sustainable sources and is recommended by the WWF (WWF Score 2) and those with labels that promote biodiversity in bodies of water and oceans.
- The Bell Food Group endeavours to preserve and promote biodiversity at its locations.

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<sup>3</sup> UN, Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 2, 1992

<sup>4</sup> Federal Office for the Environment FOEN, Swiss Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, 2022

<sup>5</sup> Deforestation fronts – drivers and responses in a changing world – full report.pdf ([wwf.ch](https://www.wwf.ch))

<sup>6</sup> Bell Food Group Prohibited products and production methods (DON'TS)

<sup>7</sup> International Union for Conservation of Nature, [www.iucnredlist.org](https://www.iucnredlist.org)

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## 5. Explanation of principles

### Prohibition on endangered animal species and production methods

Prohibited products and production methods are outlined in the so-called DON'TS list<sup>4</sup> of the Bell Food Group. It is prohibited to procure or sell such products anywhere in the Bell Food Group or for them to become the property of the Bell Food Group. The DON'TS list includes products from critically endangered species (according to the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature<sup>8</sup> and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora<sup>9</sup>), genetically modified foods or fish, and seafood from farms with environmentally damaging practices.

### Labels and minimum standards

The Bell Food Group is committed to increasing the proportion of raw materials with labels indicating ecological added value. It defines precisely in this respect which labels are recognised as labels with added value by the Bell Food Group. These include organic labels or labels with regulations on the handling of water, soil, biodiversity and/or climate in the area of agricultural production (e.g. GlobalGAP, IP Suisse), fishing (e.g. ASC and MSC) or labels that guarantee that animals have at least a single avenue of access to fresh air. Whenever possible, preference is given to standards and certifications with regular independent inspections. Cooperation with various organisations, such as the umbrella organisation Bio Suisse, the SwissGAP association, the Swiss Vegetable Producers Association (VSGP) and the Swiss Fruit, Vegetable and Potato Trade Association (SWISSCOFEL), is encouraged wherever possible.

The Bell Food Group's contracted agricultural producers are almost exclusively certified according to the GlobalG.A.P./SwissG.A.P. certification system. This promotes sustainable farming methods and environmentally friendly practices, minimises the use of pesticides and fertilisers, and supports responsible use of water and consideration for the welfare of workers and animals. The Bell Food Group's commitment to sustainable agriculture is therefore clearly substantiated.

### Breeding

Breeding should be geared towards promoting healthy, energetic, locally adapted and resilient plants. The Bell Food Group does not accept genetically modified plants (DON'TS list<sup>4</sup>).

### Cultivation and harvesting

Business units of the Bell Food Group with direct contact to farmers offer them professional training, a know-how transfer, advice and support for SwissGAP certification. In addition, recommendations on fertilisation and plant protection are revised annually and appropriate advice is offered during the growing season.

Hilcona Agrar, which is part of the Hilcona business area, offers financing and support for trials to identify control strategies to combat pests during cultivation of processed vegetables. Practical trials are also being conducted on robot technology in cultivation for mechanical weed control or plant protection in order to reduce the use of plant protection products.

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<sup>8</sup> IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

<sup>9</sup> Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

## Water

Global water availability is decreasing because of the increasing demand caused by population growth, eating behaviour and the pursuit of prosperity. Increasingly longer or more frequent periods of drought or dry spells in regions that are already arid are exacerbating the shortage.

In addition, water quality can be negatively affected by inappropriate agricultural practices.

## Fresh water

With regard to water, the Bell Food Group is of the opinion that fresh water extraction will continue to increase. Nevertheless, the Bell Food Group is convinced that good and efficient use of knowledge, expertise and the right tools will provide solutions to the water problem in agriculture. The Bell Food Group therefore requires all contracted suppliers of fruit and vegetables (fresh and processed) to have a water management system in place by 2026. The Bell Food Group also determines the water footprint of its most important products. To this end, it identifies water-intensive products and water-critical origins in the upstream value chain in order to reduce the water footprint in water-critical regions and establish efficient irrigation systems, particularly for products with high water consumption. The majority shareholder of the Bell Food Group, the Coop Group Cooperative, developed a water module (add-on SPRING) together with GlobalGAP in 2006 to measure and monitor water consumption, identify sustainable water use and protect water sources. The Eisberg business area of the Bell Food Group endeavours to raise awareness of the importance of water use in agriculture. To this end, farmers are shown how they can use water sustainably for the efficient cultivation of crops and what measures they can take to avoid wasting this resource, without any loss of yield or often even improving crop yields. In addition to setting itself targets at product level, the Bell Food Group has also set goals for its production locations (over 50 locations in 14 countries). For example, specific water consumption (the volume of fresh water used) is to be reduced by 10 per cent by 2026 compared to the reference year 2021. In risk areas where water is scarce, the Bell Food Group strives to reduce the fresh water consumption of its operations by 50 per cent in order to minimise the impact on surrounding ecosystems. For the Bell Food Group, compliance with local legal requirements for wastewater quality is a matter of course. It endeavours to continuously improve its own wastewater quality and increase the proportion of water reused.

## Seas

The main threats to seas and oceans are overfishing, plastic pollution, industrial wastewater and wastewater from agriculture. The progressive degradation of habitats in coral reefs, shallow seas, open oceans and coastal areas has caused the populations of many species of marine animals to dwindle.<sup>10, 11</sup>

The seas form an important ecosystem and are core providers of food for human beings and animals. The Bell Food Group strives to assume its responsibility in the procurement and manufacture of its products and to find environmentally friendly and sustainable solutions.

Sustainable fishing practice means that fish stocks are of a healthy size, the marine habitat is preserved and effective management of fisheries is implemented<sup>12</sup>. The minimising of bycatching is also part of an effective management strategy. The Bell Food Group works closely together with WWF Switzerland. The insistence on nature-compatible and sustainable fishing is of central importance for the preservation of biodiversity and the reproductive capacity of the world's oceans. Bell Seafood is a founding member of the WWF SEAFOOD GROUP and is committed to gradually making its range more sustainable and supporting the labels recommended by WWF Switzerland. The fish species classified by the WWF as the most endangered are labelled with a score of 5 and are being removed from the Bell Food Group range. WWF Switzerland updates annually its assessment of fish sources that are important for the Swiss market and proposes alternatives for overfished stocks.<sup>13</sup> The Bell Food Group undertakes to achieve over 99 per cent of its sales of fish and seafood with a WWF score of 1–3 by the end of 2026 and to avoid fish and seafood that is not recommended by the WWF. Bell Seafood also declares all products according to origin (the most precise possible geographical region) and production method.

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<sup>10</sup> [Greenpeace.at](https://www.greenpeace.at/), Threats to the Oceans

<sup>11</sup> [WWF.de](https://www.wwf.de/), Marine Destruction

<sup>12</sup> UN, Convention on Biological Diversity, COP15 Biodiversity Agreement

<sup>13</sup> [WWF purchasing guide for fish and seafood: Which products come from sustainable sources? \(de\)](#)

WWF Switzerland recommends that attention be paid to procuring trustworthy environmental labels such as organic, ASC and MSC. MSC-certified fisheries are committed to developing effective management strategies to minimise their bycatch<sup>14</sup>. ACS-certified fisheries must demonstrate that they actively reduce undesirable impacts on the environment and biodiversity.<sup>15</sup> The Bell Food Group is therefore aiming to achieve 66 per cent of its sales with labelled fish and seafood (e.g. ASC, MSC, Bio Suisse Bud, EU organic) by 2026.

## Eutrophication

Eutrophication is the accumulation of nutrients in an ecosystem and is caused by two key nutrients: nitrogen and phosphorus. Anthropogenic eutrophication is mainly caused by intensive agricultural use (overfertilisation) and wastewater.<sup>16</sup> The effects of eutrophication generally influence plants directly and animals indirectly through altered environmental conditions. Thanks to biological and sustainable mining methods, significantly fewer eutrophying substances are used. The use of fertilisers is strictly limited in organic farming. Synthetic chemical pesticides are prohibited, resulting in 50 per cent less nitrate in groundwater and 30 per cent more species in the soil.<sup>17</sup> By promoting organic products and products from sustainable production, the Bell Food Group ensures that fewer eutrophying substances are released into water bodies and groundwater.

## Soil

Soils are the world's most species-rich ecosystem, with around 60 per cent of all species living in soil.<sup>18</sup>

Soils are polluted by factors such as agricultural intensification, climate change, fertilisers and pesticides. Fertilising and ploughing can increase yields in the short term, but without the active promotion of soil life, soil loses humus year after year and fertility decreases.<sup>19</sup>

Wheel loads of agricultural vehicles have risen sharply since the 1960s, resulting in soil compaction which impairs growth conditions for plant roots. The increase in soil compaction also reduces the water conductivity and water storage capacity of soil, meaning less water can penetrate the soil and more water drains off on the surface.<sup>20</sup>

## Turf

Peatlands are major carbon and water reservoirs. Although they only cover 3 per cent of the earth's surface, they store around a third of the world's carbon reserves.

The draining of moors is progressing steadily because of utilisation of the water level and the greatly increased demand for land.

While the use of peat as fuel or bedding for livestock barns is no longer an issue today, peat is still mainly extracted for use as a plant substrate (potting soil) for industrial and private vegetable and flower cultivation. In conventional cultivation of young plants, mixtures of 100 per cent peat are still generally used, while in organic cultivation, mixtures with 70 per cent peat are usual. As part of a declaration of intent to reduce the use of peat with the Federal Office for the Environment (signed by Bio Suisse, among others), it has now been agreed that the sector will initially reduce the amount of peat in propagating beds for young vegetable plants to a maximum of 40 per cent by 2028.<sup>21</sup> The use of peat will be reduced step by step in the Bell Food Group's efforts to expand its organic range. The Eisberg business area is also investigating peat alternatives for vegetable, salad and fruit production and promoting innovative projects to replace peat in fruit and vegetable cultivation. Eisberg aims to achieve peat-free fruit and vegetable production by 2030.

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<sup>14</sup> Are MSC-certified fisheries permitted to have bycatch? | Marine Stewardship Council

<sup>15</sup> Our breeding standards ([asc-aqua.org](https://asc-aqua.org))

<sup>16</sup> Guntern J et al, Excessive nitrogen and phosphorus inputs damage biodiversity, forests and water bodies, 2020

<sup>17</sup> [Bioaktuell.ch](https://bioaktuell.ch), Why Organic? The advantages of organic farming in a nutshell

<sup>18</sup> [Geo.de](https://geo.de), Report by a research team from Switzerland in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)

<sup>19</sup> [Biodiversityinitiative.ch](https://biodiversityinitiative.ch), Soil Biodiversity

<sup>20</sup> [Agroscope.admin.ch](https://agroscope.admin.ch), Increasingly heavier agricultural machinery puts soils under pressure – Study results published in Soil and Tillage Research)

<sup>21</sup> [Bioaktuell.ch](https://bioaktuell.ch), Peat reduction in the cultivation of vegetables

## Extinction of species

The Living Planet Index (LPI) provides a record of the state of biodiversity. Population data is collected at specific measuring points and their changes determined for this purpose.

Food production has a strong influence on biodiversity through agriculture. The Bell Food Group avoids practices that are responsible for biodiversity loss in order to minimise this impact. The Bell Food Group requires at least GlobalGAP (incl. SwissGAP) certification for 99 per cent of contracted producers and 95 per cent of fresh and processed (with at least a 50 per cent share) fruit and vegetables by the end of 2026. This promotes sustainable production methods, responsible use of water and consideration for the welfare of workers and animals. More efficient production with responsible use of chemicals and integrated pest control contributes to sustainable fruit and vegetable cultivation in this respect.

In addition, the Bell Food Group promotes organic farming, as this ensures greater biodiversity in agriculture by reducing the intensity of cultivation, avoiding the use of synthetic chemical pesticides, increasing the diversity of crop rotations and promoting greater biodiversity in semi-natural areas.

In addition, the Bell Food Group implements annual measures (primarily) at/with contracted producers to promote biodiversity.

## Climate change

In the sustainability strategy, the Bell Food Group has set itself the goal of developing measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> within areas that can be directly influenced and in the supply chain, calculating the climate impact of our most important products / raw materials and determining the main effects of our business activities on the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint. As part of the Science Based Targets, it has formulated measures and promotes and implements projects in the area of sustainability with a focus on reducing emissions and energy consumption in integrated production.

## Monoculture

The Bell Food Group aims to contribute to biodiversity by significantly increasing its sales of organic products and products from sustainable cultivation by 2026.

## Deforestation and the conversion of forests

The Bell Food Group recognises its responsibility and strives to achieve a zero deforestation strategy.

Soy and palm oil products used in the manufacture of animal products must come from responsible sources wherever possible.

The Bell Food Group accepts the standard of Soy Network Switzerland (ProTerra, ProTerra Europe, RTRS Non-GMO [Round Table on Responsible Soy], Donau Soja, Europe Soya and Bio Suisse) as a benchmark for sustainability. It also aims to ensure that feed contains only certified soy. For its tofu production, it relies entirely on soy from Europe, with the majority of its soy being organically grown in Switzerland.

The Bell Food Group is accelerating the elimination of palm oil by 2026. Certified palm oil is used where it is not possible to do without this ingredient. The RSPO IP (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil – Identity Preserved) and RSPO SG (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil – Segregated) standards are accepted for palm oil. Palm oil has already been eliminated from animal feed in integrated poultry production.

There is also a determination to achieve deforestation- and conversion-free supply chains in meat procurement, thus ensuring that no forest areas are converted for pastureland.

## **Biodiversity at the Bell Food Group locations**

The Bell Food Group also strives to implement measures to promote biodiversity at our locations wherever possible. The Group has therefore implemented guidelines for the design of outdoor areas. The Bell Food Group wants to promote biodiversity by designing the outdoor space (surroundings, roof and, if necessary, façade) in a manner that is close to nature.

The Bell Food Group strives for ecological solutions such as species-rich green roofs for new buildings and renovations. In addition, it examines the certification of new buildings according to ecological building standards such as Minergie certification.

Contact:

Marco Märsmann

Head of Quality Management/Sustainability

Bell Food Group Ltd, Elsässerstrasse 174, 4056 Basel,

[Switzerland.sustainability@bellfoodgroup.com](mailto:Switzerland.sustainability@bellfoodgroup.com)

[www.bellfoodgroup.com](http://www.bellfoodgroup.com)