

20/05/2020

Press Release

European farmers and agri-cooperatives warn against endangering strategic EU interests in food security, agricultural competitiveness and farming income

Today, the European Commission presented two highly ambitious strategies. Their success will depend on the actors on the ground: farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives. A comprehensive independent inception impact assessment must be conducted before any legislative action is taken. European farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives need alternatives to enable them to reach the ambitious targets without destroying their livelihoods and the European rural economy. A blindfolded approach will jeopardise food security, European agricultural competitiveness and farming income, which have already been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Only with coherent EU policies and sufficient funding can agriculture and forestry continue to contribute to different EU objectives: ensuring food security and safety, supplying renewable raw materials and providing jobs to people in rural areas, while at the same time, following environmentally and biodiversity-friendly practices and combating climate change. The COVID-19 crisis and its consequent economic hardships have shown us that the EU cannot afford to endanger its own food production.

“We want to continue on our path towards more environmentally friendly agriculture and invest more. But these strategies go about this in the wrong way. They represent a general attack on European agriculture. Targets are not solutions. In order to achieve productive, competitive and resource-efficient agriculture, we need cooperation instead of new requirements. Furthermore, these strategy documents do not sufficiently take into account the necessary adjustments in the wake of COVID-19. Farmers alone must not bear the brunt of the costs of further environmental and climate protection. This would result in more European food production being outsourced to third countries and above all a large number of agricultural holdings being abandoned in the European Union.” declared the President of Copa, Mr Joachim Rukwied.

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY - The Commission’s aim to establish more protected areas will reduce the area used for agricultural production and forestry in the EU. In addition to the high potential rate of land abandonment and tougher restrictions on some of the areas that are already protected, the 10% exclusion of land from active use will have severe socio-economic and environmental consequences. It is likely that the EU will outsource its environmental footprint to third countries and put pressure on high biodiversity hotspots around the world.

Positive incentives and bottom-up participatory processes are necessary for the EU farming community to consider and accept more protected areas. Any form of protection or measures should take into account sustainable land management, as well as regional and local characteristics. Instead of new red tape and limitations, we need to incentivise investments based on innovative and affordable technologies and a better functioning, fairer agri-food chain.

When assessing the state of biodiversity, it must be taken into account that agriculture and forestry are not able to influence the external effects on ecosystems. Such effects include climate change, soil sealing, developments in infrastructure, invasive alien species, predators, poaching, etc. Therefore, as long as it can be proven that sufficient efforts were made to reach the targets, taking into account available resources, farmers and forest owners should not be blamed in the event that the targets are not met.

FARM TO FORK STRATEGY - Farmers are the first producers of food and, together with their cooperatives, the key protagonists in achieving a more sustainable food system. The legislative proposals following this strategy should help to reduce the competitive disadvantages that currently exist in relation to production methods outside the EU and to protect high European standards that are internationally recognised.

“We as farmers and agri-cooperatives should be given the tools and political certainty to make the necessary investments based on EU internal and external trade. It is not only about EU financial support for investment, but also about creating a favourable environment that enables it. European farmers and agri-cooperatives need alternative technologies, a better functioning, fairer food chain and a closer consumer connection. Farmers’ own cooperatives are the best partners in these investments.” pointed out the President of Cogeca, Mr Ramon Armengol.

European farmers and agri-cooperatives therefore urge the European Commission to ensure that the future Farm to Fork Strategy’s targets are accompanied by the comprehensive land-use sector inception impact assessment and a proper consultation with relevant stakeholders. This is particularly crucial for the use of the plant protection products, sales of antimicrobials, use of fertilisers and animal welfare rules. When proposing organic targets, the Commission must take into account the cumulative social and economic impact of the typically lower organic yields, market realities and decrease in conventional yields due to the lack of necessary tools. In light of all these issues, we are disappointed that the establishment of the EU Food Security Observatory is no longer included in the Communication.

Advocating a balanced diet and the consumption of healthy food from both animal and plant sources is essential. The European farming community supports any measure encouraging consumers to adopt a diet that ensures their good health. Therefore, any type of nutrition labelling and dietary guidelines should be based on sound science and avoid a simplistic approach, which can be misleading. In this regard, such initiatives should take into account the utmost importance of the vital nutritional value provided by agricultural products, including those of animal origin whose contribution to a healthy diet cannot be overlooked. Transparency, in particular on the origins of food, is also crucial.

CAP - As confirmed by the Commission’s internal reflections, also published today, the CAP provides the appropriate framework to support the ambitions set out at European level. The CAP payments and the criteria set out in the conditionality rules, such as integrated pest management, animal welfare, food safety, use of antimicrobials and landscape features reach 6.5 million farmers. This shows that the CAP has the most potential to influence the decisions taken by farmers. The targets set by the Member States within the scope of their CAP Strategic Plans should take this into account and not only deliver on the ambition of the European Green Deal, but also consider what has already been achieved. Since the 1990s, for example, European agriculture has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by more than 20% while increasing its production by 25%.

For further information, please contact:

François Guerin

Senior Policy Advisor

francois.guerin@copa-cogeca.eu

Ksenija Simovic

Communications Officer

Mobile: + 32 2 287 27 07

ksenija.simovic@copa-cogeca.eu

CDP(20)3425:1
