

COPA(24)00536:3 – PPA/ mt

Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN
President of the European
Commission

Mr Alexander De Croo
Prime Minister of Belgium
Council presidency

Copy EU Head of States

Brussels, 23 February 2024

Subject: For the EU to effectively address historic farm protests, it must put agriculture back at the core of its strategy

Dear President, Dear Prime Minister,

Agriculture and forestry have traditionally served as the cornerstone of the European project due to their strategic significance. Our sectors produce a wide range of commodities essential to all and are key players in ensuring food security for 450 million EU consumers as the world's largest exporters of food and agricultural goods. Farmers are the first to feel the consequences of extreme weather events while contributing to the green transition by reducing emissions and storing carbon, being the custodians of rural areas and biodiversity. Furthermore, we actively engage in climate-smart and sustainable agriculture and forestry initiatives across our regions.

In recent years, the voices of European farmers and agricultural cooperatives have grown increasingly vital, yet our concerns have largely gone unheeded. Instead, many decision-makers seem to perceive our sector solely as a problem, overlooking the hundreds of thousands of virtuous sustainability initiatives and neglecting the strategic importance of agriculture and forestry within the European project. This paradigm must shift now! When addressing real issues, we are wasting valuable time allowing polarisation to predominate in policymaking instead of relying on science and practical feedback. European farmers and agri-cooperatives are part of the solution!

We are confronting an unparalleled convergence of economic, climate and social challenges and other obstacles that endanger the livelihoods and competitiveness of numerous farmers. Many of us find ourselves caught between escalating costs and market pressures exerted by a handful of concentrated retailers and purchasing alliances operating within Member States. Additionally, certain aspects of the EU's trade policy are putting an unsustainable strain on some of our essential products, hindering our ability to fully embrace the required transitions.

From all parts of Europe, the effects of the extreme climatic events and geopolitical tensions are having immediate consequences on our rural communities and our sector's ability to continue to provide society with affordable commodities. How can we effectively prepare for generational renewal amidst such circumstances?

These challenges have been exacerbated by **additional constraints and regulations from the European Union**. The Green Deal for agriculture was a regulatory tsunami, with too many rushed consultations, top-down targets lacking assessment, and proposals pushed through without feasibility studies.

The increasing number of legitimate farming protests in recent weeks and months highlights the pressing necessity for the European Union to shift the focus back to rural areas, agriculture and forestry within its policies. **Our members support peaceful demonstrations. This cannot be emphasised enough. We will not encourage any action which runs counter to the rules set up by our democratic society.**

Notwithstanding, our farmers, forest owners and agri-cooperatives **need stability, visibility and predictability** to be able to look to the future with confidence. A competitive cooperative model aimed at improving the bargaining power of farmers in the food supply chain, facilitating joint investments to allow farmers to obtain more added value for their products and encouraging farmers' economic, social and environmental sustainability must be promoted.

Our productive autonomy and the transition to a climate-neutral Europe must be the EU's strategic compass. Today, as members of Copa and Cogeca, we emphasise the urgent necessity to address the concerns raised by the thousands of protesting farmers and to offer a long-term outlook for the sector.

In the short term, focus must be directed to the following:

1. **Implement urgent measures to simplify farmers' work and lives** and introduce incentivising measures that make a difference. This involves eliminating any excessive administrative burdens incompatible with agronomical conditions as well as one-size-fits-all, top-down legislation. Therefore, we welcome a simplification package intended to address farmers' concerns. In this respect, we call on the European Commission to grant derogations from conditionality requirements (e.g. GAEC 1, GAEC 6, GAEC 7), eco-schemes and agri-environment and climate commitments built on these. Specific attention also to GAEC 2 should be put in place to avoid any negative economic impact associated with its implementation. A preliminary step (albeit partial and insufficient) has already been taken for 2024 regarding GAEC 8.
2. **Enhance the Commission's proposal concerning the renewal of Autonomous Trade Measures for Ukraine (ATMs)**, by including cereals, oilseeds and honey in the system of automatic safeguard measures proposed for poultry, eggs and sugar. We would also ask for the reference period for this system to be modified from the average 2022/2023 volumes to the average 2021/2022 ones. Specific support for customs services at borders with Ukraine should be guaranteed.
3. **Ensure reciprocity in farm production standards** and a level playing field in our trade. Send a strong message and halt the EU Mercosur agreement in its current state.
4. **Ensure European farms receive fair remuneration within the food chain**, with urgent and effective implementation of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive in each Member State, fairer price distribution along the chain together with an effective ban on below-cost-selling.
5. **Advocate for a breakthrough on category 1 NGT plants** to convey a forward-looking message for our sector regarding innovation and practical solutions.

6. **Additional regulations** such as the **Industrial Emission Directive (IED), Nature Restoration Law (NRL) and Packaging and Packaging Waste**, which are still under discussion by EU legislators, represent imposed "targeted top-down" approaches lacking adequate means, transitions, and funding. This should be corrected and reflect, where needed, the European Parliament mandates. Implementing these pieces of legislation on the ground in the form currently being finalised is **likely to lead to** a loss of competitiveness, increased costs and administrative burden for our members as well as **misunderstandings and rejection**.
7. We look for support for an **urgent positive decision** to the Commission proposal to **amend Bern Convention** appendices to allow for population management of wolves, which would benefit farmers and rural communities across the EU.

In the upcoming weeks and months, it will be necessary to **assess the Green Deal's impact on the agricultural sector and learn from it**. For the 2024-2029 mandate, we advocate for reduced regulation of higher quality. As a first step, it will be crucial to draw up an overall inventory of the impact of the legislation passed while allowing time for consultation and technical discussions on any new initiative.

Amidst these challenging times, we appreciate the extended hand and eagerness to participate in discussions facilitated by the strategic dialogue launched by European Commission President von der Leyen. We are dedicated and actively involved in ensuring the success of this strategic dialogue to restore prospects for our farmers and agricultural cooperatives in a constructive manner. In order to respond to challenges facing the farming sector, benefit from opportunities provided by research, innovation and new technologies and help get agriculture and forestry back on track, the future **Commission mandate must focus on 4 imperatives**:

1. The next EU **budget must reflect the** many challenges **facing farmers**.
2. **The trade policy agenda** must be consistent with the ambition set within the internal market while guarantying robust reciprocity measures and ensuring attention to sensitive EU productions.
3. Any new **agri-related proposals must be backed up by a feasibility study**, discussed with stakeholders.
4. A **Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Areas** with a key role as **Vice-President of the European Commission** is needed.

As the clock counts down to pivotal elections now only a few months away, those at the heart of the first common European policy who believe in the future of Europe eagerly await your reply.

Yours faithfully,



Christiane Lambert
President of Copa



Lennart Nilsson
President of Cogeca

Copa Members



Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich - LKÖ
(Austrian Chamber of Agriculture)



Boerenbond - BB



Fédération Wallonne de l'Agriculture - FWA



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Bulgarian Agrarian Chamber



Georgi Stoyanov Stoyanov

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Bulgarian Farmers Union

Cogeca Members



Österreichischer Raiffeisenverband - ÖRV
(Austrian Raiffeisen Association)



Hrvatska Poljoprivredna Komora - HPK
(Croatian Chamber of Agriculture)



Confederation of Finnish Cooperatives - PELLERVO



La Coopération Agricole



Deutscher Raiffeisenverband - DRV
(German Raiffeisen Association)



Panagrotikos Farmers' Union
(PANAGROTIKOS)



SASOEE



Agrární Komora České Republiky - AKCR
(Czech Agrarian Chamber)



Irish Co-operative Organisation Society Ltd. - ICOS



Zemědělský Svaz České Republiky - ZSCR
(Agricultural Association of the Czech Republic)



Alleanza delle Cooperative Italiane
Agroalimentare - ACI



Landbrug & Fødevarer - DAFC
(Danish Agriculture and Food Council)



Latvijas Lauksaimniecības Kooperatīvu Asociācija - LLKA
(Latvian Agricultural Cooperatives Association)



Eesti Põllumajandus-Kaubanduskoda - EPKK
(Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce Estonian Farmers Organisations and Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce))



Nationale Coöperatieve Raad - N.C.R.
(National Co-operative Council)



Eestimaa Talupidajate Keskliit - ETK
(Estonian Farmers Federation)



Confederação Nacional das Cooperativas
Agrícolas e do Crédito Agrícola de Portugal -
CONFAGRI



Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajain Keskusliitto - MTK
(Central Union of Agricultural Producers and
Forest Owners)



Zadružna Zveza Slovenije - ZZS
(Cooperative Union of Slovenia)



Svenska Lantbruksproducenternas
Centralförbund - SLC



COOPERATIVAS AGRO-ALIMENTARIAS DE
ESPAÑA, U. DE COOP.



Chambres d'agriculture France - APCA



Fédération Nationale des Syndicats
d'Exploitants Agricoles - FNSEA



Deutscher
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DBV

Deutscher Bauernverband e.V. - DBV



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NEMZETI
AGRÁRGAZDASÁGI
KAMARA

Nemzeti Agrárgazdasági Kamara - HCA
(Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture)



IFA
Irish Farmers' Association

Irish Farmer's Association - IFA



AGRICOLTORI ITALIANI

Cia - Agricoltori italiani



Confederazione Generale dell'Agricoltura
Italiana - CONFAGRICOLTURA



Confederazione Generale dell'Agricoltura Italiana
- CONFAGRICOLTURA



Latvian Agricultural Organization Cooperation
Council - LAOCC (LOSP)



Latvijas Zemnieku Federācija - LZP
(Latvian Farmer's Federation)



Lauksaimniecības Statūtsabiedrību Asociācija
Societies - LSA
(Latvian Agricultural Statutory Societies)



Zemnieku Saeima - ZSA
(Farmers Parliament)



Lietuvos Respublikos žemės ūkio rūmai - LRŽŪR
(Chamber of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania)



Lietuvos ūkininkų sąjunga - LŪS
(Lithuanian Farmers Union)



Lietuvos Žemės ūkio Bendrovių Asociacija - LŽŪBA
(Lithuanian Association of Agricultural Companies)



Lithuanian Association of Agricultural Cooperatives - LŽŪKA "Kooperacijos kelias"



Alvesta

Centrale Paysanne Luxembourgeoise - CPL
(Luxemburg Farmers' Union)



CAH

Koperattivi Malta



TR

Land- en Tuinbouw Organisatie Nederland - LTO



Sikora M.

Federacja Branżowych Związków
Producentów Rolnych - FBZPR
(Federation of Agricultural Producers Union)



Rost Hub

Krajowa Rada Izb Rolniczych - KRIR
(National Council of Agricultural Chambers)



NSZZ RI Solidarność - SOLIDARNOSC



Związek Zawodowy Rolnictwa SAMOOBRONA
- ZZR



Związek Zawodowy Rolników - OJCZYŻNA
(FARMERS LABOR UNION)



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Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal - CAP



FEDERAȚIA NAȚIONALĂ A PRODUCĂTORILOR
DIN AGRICULTURĂ, INDUSTRIE ALIMENTARĂ
ȘI SERVICII CONEXE - PRO AGRO



UNIUNEA DE RAMURĂ NAȚIONALĂ A
COOPERATIVELOR DIN SECTORUL VEGETAL -
U.N.C.S.V.



LIGA ASOCIAȚIILOR PRODUCĂTORILOR
AGRICOLI DIN ROMANIA - LAPAR



Asociația Forta Fermierilor



Slovenská Poľnohospodárska a Potravinárska
Komora - SPPK
(Slovak Agricultural and Food Chamber)



Asociación Agraria - Jóvenes Agricultores - ASAJA



Coordinadora de Organizaciones de
Agricultores y Ganaderos - COAG - I.R.



Union de Pequeños Agricultores y Ganaderos
- UPA



Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund - LRF