

POSITION DOCUMENT on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform

In the final phase of the CAP reform, we - the Youth articulation of the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) - feel the urge to express our position. We fear that **the reformed CAP will continue to neglect the real needs of young farmers, and in particular small, agroecological farmers.** In 2017, the European Court of Auditors¹ had already reported that the youth policies of the CAP for the period 2007-2020 were ineffective in addressing the burning issue of generational renewal in agriculture in Europe. Given that we see no significant change in youth policies as part of the reform, we expect that **the CAP will continue to miss one of its main objectives: facilitating the entrance of new farmers.**

We are aware that the CAP alone cannot solve all issues. Other policies concerning rural areas as well as national measures and regulation are necessary. However, the CAP remains the main political frame for agriculture and rural development in the European Union.

Through this position paper, we want to advance our main concerns about the current CAP reform as well as present our vision and alternative proposals. The CAP policies significantly affect us, yet we have no say in its reform process. It is not sufficient that the role of young farmers is acknowledged on paper, we want effective policies to support us and the right to participate in decision-making. As there can be no future for EU agriculture without young farmers.

But let us first introduce ourselves

We are young people, passionate and dedicated to agriculture. Some of us are farmers already, but most of us are trying to become such. Some of us have formally studied agriculture, or are children of farmers, but many others come from different backgrounds. We work our native lands but we also cross borders, we are migrant and seasonal workers, we work in rural and urban areas. We are rich in our diversity. We may not have what is considered the "appropriate" experience, knowledge and skills, but we are motivated to learn. We do not aim at making European agriculture competitive and profitable but to ensure food provision through food systems that are socially and ecologically just. **We support small-scale, agro-ecological food production. We strive for food sovereignty, the safeguard of biodiversity, and the respect of the rights of peasants and agricultural workers.**

We want a future-proof and generationally-fair agriculture. We want the EU to acknowledge the key role of young farmers for today's and tomorrow's agriculture and to support and reward them accordingly. Particularly, we want the EU to prioritise those young farmers who produce to supply local needs and adopt agroecological approaches. We reject food systems which depend on capitalism, industrialisation, neo-colonialism, exploitation and violence against humans and Nature. **For us, agriculture is not only about producing food, it is about taking a political stance.**

¹ European Court of Auditors, 2017. *Special report no 10 EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal.* Available at: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=41529>

Our concerns, our demands, our alternatives

Overall labour input in EU agriculture has been falling and only 11% of all farm holdings are run by farmers under 40². According to a recent evaluation study conducted by the European Commission³, the CAP contributes to the maintenance of existing farms rather than the creation of new ones. Medium and small-scale attempts by young people and new entrants to start a new activity fail due to lack of support (finance, training, advice) and incentives.

We demand Member States to **allocate a sufficient budget to young farmers** as part of their National Strategic Plans (NSP) and to increase the maximum level of funding beyond 3% of the overall CAP budget, which seems to us an insufficient and unambitious deal. We expect **strong monitoring, accountability, and transparency** of youth-policies at the national level to ensure both compliance and the reproduction of good practices. We also believe that supplementary income support measures to young farmers should not be voluntary for Member States.

In some countries, income support is slowing the process of generational renewal because some farmers use the payments as income support to compensate for low pensions.

We ask Member States to seriously **evaluate the impact of national pension schemes** in limiting the access of young farmers to agriculture and to adapt the use of pension schemes in a way that will work in favor of both younger and older generations.

According to the EU Court of Auditors, the CAP is failing in supporting young farmers and new entrants because there is no analysis of what their real needs are⁴. Measures from both Pillar I (Direct Payments) and Pillar II (Rural Development) do not match necessities other than additional income and fail to reward best practices. We want to emphasize that the last EU survey on youth and agriculture was conducted in 2015.

Ensuring that the CAP matches real needs and rewards best practices is a responsibility of both the EU and individual Member States. We demand a **new EU survey to evaluate the current needs of young farmers and new entrants and we ask to include small-scale, agroecological farmers**. Surveys and evaluations at the EU, national, and regional level must consider the diversity of experiences among young and entrant farmers, especially since they significantly differ from established farmers.

² Eurostat, 2016. *Young people in farming*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/young-farmers_en

³ European Commission, 2021. *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EVALUATION of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/ext-eval-cap-gene-renewal-study-report_2021_en.pdf

⁴ European Court of Auditors, 2017. *Special report no 10 EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal*. Available at: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=41529>

One point of key importance to us is that the logic behind the allocation of CAP financial support is unacceptably unjust: based on ownership of land and capital, it prioritizes big and wealthy farms with capacity for big-scale investments while neglecting medium and small farmers who adopt more environmentally and climate-sound solutions (es. reduced inputs and use of second hand material). This capitalist logic contradicts the vision of the “Farm to Fork” (F2F) Strategy, which states the need to support agroecological and small-scale farmers towards the creation of more sustainable and shorter food chains. It also contradicts the objectives of the European Green Deal (EGD), which has ambitious objectives in terms of emission reductions and social equality.

We urge the EU to **solve the incompatibility between the CAP, the F2F strategy, and the EGD**. We also expect a CAP in line with the new EU **Biodiversity Strategy** to safeguard agricultural biodiversity in air, land, and water ecosystems. Natural resources like land, water, and seeds are common goods and cannot be protected if they are sold on the market like commodities.

We firmly believe that eco-schemes and greening measures will not contribute to meeting the objectives of the F2F, the EGD, and the Biodiversity Strategy. We consider these measures a further example of greenwashing to leave the power in the hands of the agri-business. There is nothing “ecological” in precision and high-tech farming. We want to denounce that **eco-schemes as currently defined will do nothing but reproduce the destructive effects of intensive agriculture and farming on ecosystems, climate, and people’s livelihoods**.

According to the European Parliament, access to land is the major barrier for young farmers and new entrants⁵. Due to privatization and commodification processes, land is too expensive to rent and buy for those who have not inherited any. Moreover, hectare-based allocation of CAP subsidies contributes to land concentration and competition which makes it even more difficult for new entrants to start an agricultural activity.

Youth also have less access to credits: the EC reports that 27% of all applications submitted by young farmers in the EU are rejected by banks compared to a much lower rate of 9% rejection for older farmers⁶.

We welcome and encourage the realisation of a **mandatory capping system** to limit the amount of subsidies allocated to big farms as well as of **mandatory redistributive aid** from large farms to medium and small ones, especially those run by young people.

⁵ European Parliament, 2017. *Research for AGRI Committee – Young farmers – Policy implementation after the 2013 CAP reform, DG for Internal Policies, policy department B – Structural and cohesion policies*. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/602006/IPOL_STU\(2017\)602006_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/602006/IPOL_STU(2017)602006_EN.pdf)

⁶ European Commission, 2021. *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EVALUATION of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/ext-eval-cap-gene-renewal-study-report_2021_en.pdf

We ask for **a more radical change in the way subsidies and other financial aid are allocated**. Subsidies allocation cannot be based on the amount of owned land, capital, or capacity for investments but on **the delivery of socio-ecological practices and services** to local communities and for the common good: the production of healthy and nutritious food, the creation of regular jobs, the revitalization of rural areas, the safeguard of biodiversity, the respect of the environment and of animals, the use of second-hand material. Moreover, we call both EU and Member States to support those initiatives that have been successful in facilitating the access of new entrants to agriculture - such as access to land - and particularly small and agroecological farmers.

New installations are often characterised by a small economic size and by an initially part-time commitment of the tenant farmer. Thus, we advocate for an income supplement to help new farmers: we believe that **income aid should be provided in combination with settling-in grants and that the amount received should progressively decrease as the income increases**. This aid should be divided and paid per month to ensure that it truly is an addition to incomes and that it will not be directed towards investment.

We are concerned by the impact of continuous market deregulation and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) on the fall of agricultural prices, which make it more and more difficult for all farmers - young and not - to make a living. CAP subsidies cannot become an economic compensation for insufficient income due to the low prices of agricultural products.

We want the CAP to be based on market regulation to **guarantee fair prices for farmers**. Market prices should take into account the social and environmental costs of production to avoid the destructive effects of dumping on export countries.

When it comes to trade, we believe that the EU must **stop supporting FTAs and mining projects** because they contribute to climate change, environmental depletion and social injustices and prevent food sovereignty in both the Global North and South.

Rural areas are being abandoned and almost 30% of EU agricultural land is at risk⁷. Because of the lack of services and infrastructures, rural areas are unattractive and inaccessible to young people. At the same time, there are lots of young people who want to live and work in farms but face multiple barriers, from medical aid to access to education and the internet.

⁷ European Parliament, 2020. *Research for AGRI Committee - The challenge of land abandonment after 2020 and options for mitigating measures*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2020\)652238](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2020)652238)

We must stop using rural areas for the limitless expansion of monoculture and turn them instead into rich and attractive places for young people to live and work. Medium and small-scale agriculture offers the opportunity to create employment in rural areas, especially for young people. Young farmers are also a potential bridge between rural and urban areas: they tend to produce for citizens, cooperatives and other direct sales outlets (CSA, food-cooperatives) rather than for traditional wholesalers, and they often live and work on the farm.

We call Member States to **increase the relevance and the resources allocated to Pillar II (Rural Development) of the CAP**, with investments based on the specific needs of each territory. We believe that these measures should be compulsory and not voluntary for Member States. Given the difficulty of young farmers and new entrants to start an agricultural activity, we believe that all new entrants should receive direct timely financial aid to start operating (e.g. 25.000 euro).

Youth-funds from Pillar II should be allocated by Member States through transparent criteria based on equality and necessity and not on the economic possibilities of each region. We need a fair distribution of money to open opportunities to those territories with the least favourable socio-economic conditions.

Access to knowledge is recognized by the European Commission as another barrier for young farmers and new entrants. In 2016 only 43% of young farm managers had more than practical experience⁸. We believe that access to training, advice and support for young farmers in Europe is insufficient. Most Farm Advisory Systems (FAS) for new entrants in the EU are in fact rare, insufficient or non-existent, and they are not free.

We believe that the CAP should facilitate the **creation of support services for young farmers** at the local, regional, and national level. These initiatives should be **free and accessible** and give advice on different aspects including access to land, finance and other resources. The CAP should also support initiatives aimed at skills and knowledge-sharing among young farmers. Such initiatives already exist in Europe and should be considered examples of best practices.

Many young farmers and new entrants, migrants or not, are victims of exploitation. Besides having to accept precarious and illegal working conditions, many youth do not have access to or have insufficient access to social protection schemes. Without employment and social protection, young agricultural workers can struggle to ensure basic needs (clean water, sanitation, food, shelter, and health care) leading to multiple human rights violations.

⁸ European Commission, 2021. *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EVALUATION of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/ext-eval-cap-gene-renewal-study-report_2021_en.pdf

We ask the **inclusion of social conditionality** in the CAP⁹. Farms that violate human and youth rights must stop receiving support from the EU and Member States. We particularly want to see **the role of young women and young migrants** in agriculture clearly recognized and supported by institutions at the local, national, and EU level, and we expect coherence with other policy fields, such as migration policies.

We are concerned by the poor participation of young farmers' in EU decision-making, and particularly in the reform process of the CAP. We are very worried by the fact that young, small-scale farmers are not represented despite their relevance for the future of peasant and family agriculture in Europe.

We think that the CAP should facilitate the creation of a new governance model for agriculture in Europe, based on the principle of **food sovereignty**. For this, we believe that it is absolutely necessary to **enhance and diversify the participation of young farmers in decision-making spaces and processes**, ensuring dialogue between them and EU institutions. Therefore, we ask for the establishment of a **EU Civil Dialogue Group dedicated to young farmers**.

We are concerned about the over-reliance of the CAP on new technologies and digitalisation because they depend on corporate power, extractivism, and because they come with enormous social and environmental costs.

We instead **support peasant technologies and innovation, based on agroecology**, which do not require the depletion of natural resources and are accessible to everybody. We ask EU institutions to stop supporting a food system in which corporate actors have more power than peasants.

We reject the liberalization of New Breeding Techniques (NBTs) because - like older generations of GMOs - they can put at risk agroecological diversity, farmers rights and peasant knowledge. We ask for the **ban of the patentability of genes and native characteristics of plants and animals**¹⁰, and the **recognition of the rights of farmers to use and exchange their peasant seeds**.

⁹ European Coordination Via Campesina, 2021. *Open Letter: the new CAP needs social conditionality*. Available at: <https://www.eurovia.org/open-letter-the-new-cap-needs-social-conditionality>

¹⁰ European Coordination Via Campesina, 2016. *Contribution of ECVC to the debate on Patents on plant and animal materials in the EU*. Available at: <https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/EN-Contribution-of-ECVC-to-the-debate-on-Patents-on-plant-and-animal-materials-in-the-EU.pdf>

The way forward



Europe has to encourage and support the entrance of new farmers if it wants to guarantee food security for the years to come. This is not a moral duty, but a crucial necessity. We need a longer-term perspective and a change of paradigm for the future of agriculture. Food sovereignty and agroecology already offer concrete solutions on how we can produce food sustainably and fairly, respecting Nature and human rights, supporting producers and local communities. Peasant, small scale farming has fed humanity successfully and sustainably for thousands of years, ensuring livelihoods in rural areas. **We must keep peasant farming alive and the only way to do it is by acknowledging and supporting the young people who are interested in it.** Yet we first need the political will to change as **there can be no food sovereignty within an economic system where profits and continuous growth matter more than food.**



EUROPEAN COORDINATION VIA CAMPESINA

The European Coordination Via Campesina is a European grassroots organization which currently gathers 31 national and regional farmer, farm worker and rural organizations based in 21 European countries. Rooted on the right to Food Sovereignty, our main objective is the defence of farmers' and field workers' rights as well as the promotion of diverse and sustainable family and peasant farming. These principles in turn, demand food and agricultural policies based on legitimacy, fairness, solidarity and sustainability. These are necessary to ensure food security, food safety, public health, employment in rural areas and to tackle the issues of the global food crisis and climate change. We demand the development of a new and improved EU agricultural policy based on the above principles. ECVC is the regional member of La Vía Campesina, the largest grassroots international peasant movement. Together we strive for societies where agriculture serves the needs of the communities rather than financial markets or corporations.