



**POSITION PAPER**

# The Agriculture we need

*Environment, health, agriculture & fisheries*

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## THE AGRICULTURE WE NEED....

The primary goal of our agriculture is to feed the population, with quality products, whilst preserving the planet's ecosystems and the vitality of our rural areas.

The current situation is not good for farmers, consumers, nor for the environment. However, those who suffer most are the arable and livestock farmers who face great uncertainty over their future. Perhaps because of this, agricultural activity is less attractive for young people, and there is little generational change. We need change and progress to strengthen the role of European agriculture and give it a long-term perspective. Taxpayers rightly ask us to link our policies more closely to high quality food, human health, the fight against climate change, protection of our environment, animal welfare, and safeguarding jobs in agricultural and rural areas. It is up to us to listen and to involve farmers in these changes so that they can take their rightful place at the heart of society, and at the heart of the European project.

Beyond Europe, in the context of globalization, while continental states like China and Brazil are increasing their budgets for agricultural and food policy, it would be illogical for us to reduce them at EU level.

It is urgent that Europe accepts its international responsibility and sets up a real strategic food autonomy plan, safeguarding its food and agriculture capacities while free trade agreements continue to be developed. Potential benefits as well as negative impacts of increased competition and agricultural concessions in trade negotiations must be seriously examined, to ensure the right economic balance and that they do not threaten sensitive sectors of European agriculture, and with them many of our rural areas and territories. Fairness and balance have to be the leading principles for trade agreements. At the same time, the agricultural sector must prepare itself for the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the repercussions this may have on the EU's budget and trading markets. Our food security needs require us to refocus on our agricultural activities and this implies that the EU must evaluate carefully the impact and scope of its free trade agreements, and help revive a new multilateral order based on cooperation between stabilizing and sustainable agricultural policies, in order to ensure better income stability. It is first and foremost what our farmers want us to do.

European agriculture needs a brave and innovative approach! We need a revolution in our agricultural policy, and we need it now!

## 1. A NEW CONTEXT

While we live in a globalized world which seems to be shrinking as climatic events increasingly affect us all and global trade grows more dominant, we need to strengthen our own agriculture systems in Europe and make them more resilient and able to meet our citizens' basic need for food. Increasingly frequent fires, droughts and other natural disasters or climate related events directly affect food supply, availability and cost for every one of Europe's citizens. Making this sector more resilient in an increasingly fragile world should be at the heart of the Union's work to ensure future stability.

Agriculture and the agri-food business represent 6% of the EU's GDP, 11 million farms and 44 million jobs (of which 22 million on farms). Over several decades in a number of European countries, rural areas have seen big reductions in the number of farmers, farm incomes fall and agricultural employment lose ground as capital is substituted for labour. In the period 2000-2012, 4,8 million full-time jobs in EU agriculture disappeared, and these job losses were concentrated in the newest member states.<sup>1</sup>

- Agriculture remains a key driver for rural jobs. Three quarters of jobs are in family-run farms and businesses and many of these are growing.
- There are wide variations between Member States, and between different parts of the industry in social and economic terms, including wages. Seasonal labour is common in different areas, depending on the type of agriculture or production, and so we have high levels of movement of people within the EU.
- Farmers find it harder now to be good in both livestock and arable production at the same time as specialisation has been triggered by different phenomena, such as: unbalanced border protection in earlier years which made imported animal feed more attractive than home-grown; development of refrigerated supply chains, more container transport, and global internet connectivity between clients and growers.
- Food diversity - and hence biodiversity - is essential in the long term, calling into question obligatory registration of seed and plant varieties, and a quasi-monopoly situation which keeps small operators out of that market.

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<sup>1</sup> Source DG AGRI Brief n.8/2013:

[https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/rural-area-economics/briefs/pdf/08\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/rural-area-economics/briefs/pdf/08_en.pdf)

## **1.1. As the liberal model runs out of steam, we need a more social model**

- Although the EU is one of the biggest global agricultural powers and the single largest net exporter of agri-food products, boosted by the CAP, it is not self-sufficient in everything (notably vegetable protein for animals). At the same time, we end up with problems like food waste and obesity (a growing problem amongst children) as we produce and import more than we consume.
- Agricultural incomes are lower than in other sectors, and farm numbers are falling as they are badly affected by market volatility. Organic is currently the only consistently expanding part of the sector.
- Though intrinsically more resilient, smaller and family run farms often lose out in the search for rationalisation, economies of scale, specialisation, intensification, and competitiveness which is often geared towards export markets.
- CAP reforms, although they were intended to make improvements, have mainly reinforced these trends, further damaging farm income, employment, and local economies, and also risking food security. Some of the changes, in any case, were preceded and influenced by budget cuts and had to be made in such a way as to ensure compliance with EU's WTO commitments
- Public support is weakening as people see less connection today between CAP policies and production, job creation or the environment, despite successive reforms.
- Free Trade Agreements can provide opportunities as well as pose challenges and additional threat to localities with smaller and family run farms which form the most vulnerable parts of the sector to EU farmers, so there is a need to strengthen current safeguard mechanisms, such as tariff rate quotas and safeguard clauses and the potential exclusion of the most sensitive products during free trade agreement negotiations.

- To address these challenges, we need to :
  - keep the common market organisation and create new tools to stabilise prices and safeguard agricultural jobs and income,
  - adequately protect in free trade agreements the vulnerable sectors and products, notably through strengthening the current safeguard mechanisms such as tariff rate quotas and safeguard clauses as well as the potential exclusion of the most vulnerable products and carry out prior impact studies to assess the effects of free trade agreements on EU agriculture and give proper consideration to the cumulative impact of these trade agreements on European production.
  - enhance the control of imports of goods to ensure they strictly meet European health, food safety, social and environmental rules notably by strengthening the checks on imported agri-foods at origin and upon their arrival in the EU.
  - Take into account the seasonality of production when Community tariffs are agreed and applied.
  
- Productivity growth has partly masked the longstanding decline in profitability of some European farms, but still the profit to turnover ratio is now low (sometimes under 10%) so new coupled aid for some sectors could counter uncertainty and volatility. Guaranteeing the future of farms and farmers in this way is key to safeguarding the long term capacity to produce food.

Promoting domestic EU production as a strategic element towards ensuring food security for our citizens. Local areas and regions can all play their part in choosing local and seasonal foodstuffs for services such as hospitals, schools, retirement homes and other users of mass catering, where this can be done.

## **1.2. Urgent action for climate and environment**

- Agriculture has a major impact on the environment, our climate, biodiversity and soil quality as well as for greenhouse gas emissions. It therefore needs to be a major player in environmental protection and tackling climate change. At the same time, agriculture is particularly vulnerable to climate change impact and it will be crucial to take adaptation measures to prevent and contain damage to soil and crops due to flooding, storms, droughts or other effects of global warming. Agriculture should also become proactive through farmers who are our primary land and nature managers.
- The climate is crucial to all and not an elite issue. Inaction brings social risks such as food or energy shortages or increased migration, and we should promote connectivity to ensure that social and smart elements support rural community structures and play a key role in sustainable and productive agriculture.

### No more monopolization of plant breeding

Progress in plant breeding is key to biodiversity and environmentally friendly and sustainable agriculture, as are the many medium sized companies involved. We do not accept patents on animals and plants bred through essentially biological processes. Plant breeders' rights are currently threatened by an unclear demarcation of patent protection and this must be addressed without delay.

## **1.3. Agriculture 2.0**

All these phenomena tell us that developing a more resilient agriculture is a vital necessity for sustainability and public health. This will literally be through revolutionising practice in the field using innovative technologies and research to develop our bioeconomy and increase crop and livestock resilience for the long term.

- Encouraging the adoption of ICT-based management systems, sensor technology, biological control of pests and precision agriculture is essential. These techniques could significantly reduce the use of plant protection products, fertilizers, improve water use, combat soil erosion, and monitor animal health, nutrition, and yield.

- New solutions in animal husbandry can contribute to higher animal health and welfare, reducing the need for veterinary medicinal products, including antimicrobials.
- We should nevertheless draw attention to the fact that innovation and more technology and automation lead to job losses in traditional agricultural occupations.

#### **1.4. Society's new expectations**

- People are now less connected to agriculture than in the past and mistrust has been growing. To reverse this, and improve understanding of farmers' vital role in landscape management and food production, public finance must be linked more to public goods and less to land area.
- People now want better animal welfare and more environmentally friendly food. We must meet the wish for more and clearer consumer information about production methods on labels.
- Stakeholders of all kinds have an interest in the accountability of our agriculture systems and their future and, collectively, with institutions and elected representatives, we all need to address questions of risk linked to over-concentration, privatisation of seeds and other biological resources, or inadequate public information about food.

## 2. ... WHICH NEEDS A NEW KIND OF AGRICULTURE!

### 2.1. Ensuring farmers can make a living from their work

- Farmers as the custodians of our countryside deliver public goods as well as food, and at the same time, often share labour and resources with neighbours. They have to secure multiple income streams from diversified production and they have to be able to live with dignity from their work.
- This can include providing more services, green tourism or environmental services, and thereby keeping jobs in their localities or sometimes disadvantaged regions. Local sales and short supply chains can reduce cost, but need development and better structures, and, in parallel, quality products for wider distribution or export can bring real added value.
- Longer term contracts with fixed prices can counter global volatility effects, and can be particularly beneficial for all sectors.
- More sustainable agriculture can help cut structural burdens and overheads, by reducing inputs or moving to organic or integrated production and using biological pest-control, while still maintaining production and profitability. Bringing outsourced processes back on-farm can also help. Fair prices for agricultural products are essential - so no dumping or selling below production cost - and primary producers must receive their fair share of added value. Here stronger farmer groups can provide more leverage against large retailers or processors.
- Our agricultural producers need a greater commitment to research and innovation and reinforcement of their position in the food chain, where they are currently the weakest players, hence the need for European law to regulate the supply chain. The fixing of minimum references prices would be a good way to safeguard agricultural incomes.
- Unfair trading practices should be banned through new European regulation. In addition, market management mechanisms must also be addressed with determination in future policies.

### **2.1.1. Bring back market regulation measures**

- Serious measures are needed when markets fail, including responsive emergency measures, output reduction programmes and other private or public regulation measures.
- We need more tools for climate, health and economic risk management, particularly risk insurance for agriculture production, income stabilisation tools and mutual funds to limit the effects of price volatility within a market-oriented CAP, in order to encourage forward-looking farm management which adopts best practice and avoids pitfalls seen in risk management systems elsewhere.
- In these times of deep uncertainty over agricultural prices, the EU must take stronger action on the markets with the establishment of safety nets, and crisis prevention and management systems based on countercyclical aid in order to ensure farmers are fairly paid.

### **2.1.2. Strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain**

- Farmers' difficulties are also linked to the concentration of the market and the pressure on prices exerted in particular by the retail sector. We therefore call for a European legislative framework to combat the unfair practices of mass retailing, which damage producers and small suppliers.
- Abusive practices like late payments, passing risk to weaker operators, retroactive contract changes, or unfair termination of contracts must be subject to European law and sanctions. Producer and inter-professional organisations can be a strong defence.
- The best practice and best protective instruments for defending farmers must be spread across the EU to overcome wide variations. Competition law has to serve the welfare of producers and better take into account agriculture's special nature. This can be improved by revising existing EU legislation and providing agricultural exemptions in Competition Law.
- Primary producers need more information on prices, fluctuations and markets, and to know that they will be protected from unfair trading practices to ensure they have an incentive to invest and innovate, and so that consumers can benefit from better and more quality products at fair prices. A European Observatory could provide much of the information farmers need.

### 2.1.3. Support agriculture on a human scale

- The loss of thousands of working farms every year severely damages rural areas and communities and that is why our policy should continue to support diverse agricultural structures, whether family-run, tenanted or owner-operated, along with local or regional food processing. Our goal is to strengthen productive agriculture which supports regional economies without negative environmental impact, and which is essentially soil-based.
- Agriculture remains a key driver for rural jobs, although modernization and mechanization in agriculture tends to bring with it less job creation than does the added value of other processes which are complementary to production in rural areas. Because of this, we are fundamentally committed to the social economy and the cooperatives driving these complementary processes.
- Profit driven large businesses do not meet our wish for a balanced rural economy. We want support to be directed towards viable, sustainable small and medium sized farms with good profit to turnover ratio potential.
- A variety of producers in the regional economy ensures business diversification, and small or medium sized holdings can have lower capital requirements, and therefore be more easily transferable, as well as being a defence against the spread of industrial farms.
- Continuity in agriculture needs farms to be passed on, through family or non-family arrangements involving new and younger farmers. For transfer to be successful, the interests of both the retiree and the new farmer have to be met. New instruments will be needed in Europe to ensue this.
- Small and medium sized holdings can find it quicker and easier to adapt and innovate, but their income and working conditions need to be assured to ensure they survive and thrive.
- Farm size and production methods should be taken into account to ensure that the implementation of standards is proportionate.

## 2.2. Develop a food and nutrition policy to safeguard human health

### 2.2.1. Re-establish the link between production, food and health

- There has been a sea-change in our food standards, particularly on traceability and bacteriological quality in Europe, but people still worry about their own health or the environment when they hear about horsemeat being sold as beef, banned pesticides being used or legal ones used above permitted levels, and they fear risks from endocrine disruptors like Bisphenol-A, or from nitrates. Continued vigilance is needed when it comes to health, and the EU has to safeguard it in a balanced and independent way.
- Higher levels of additives, and processes such as 'cracking' to separate whole foods, or others which can result in low nutrient levels, all fail to respect food seasonality and risk provoking food sensitivities.
- We need foods which have high nutritional value and don't contain harmful residues or synthetic molecules (from pesticides for example) which could cause endocrine or neurological damage in consumers. Food safety regulation and controls are crucial in our food systems and help us fight against the kind of frauds seen in the past linked to various foods.
- Our staple foods must be wholesome, nutritious and free from non-permitted substances. Production systems must guarantee this as far as the final consumer.
- Meat consumption in the EU (currently double the recommended level) remains high, and a reduction could contribute to reducing obesity, heart disease and some kinds of cancer. Lower consumption could also result in less intensive, more grass-fed animal production and free up croplands currently devoted to growing animal feed.

### 2.2.2. Guarantee the precautionary principle

- Prohibit products which are potentially dangerous to health or the environment

Selective breeding of plants and animals has always been at the heart of our agriculture, and will remain key to sustainable agriculture in the future. There are constant new developments and science offers enormous potential for more resilient agricultural plants and animals. Just as public opinion is clearly set against GMOs, we also have concerns about how far living material can be manipulated. A once-and-for-all decision is

inadequate when ongoing scientific development requires continuing dialogue and ethical consideration. We need a vigilant and balanced approach. Boundaries are being pushed all the time, and we have a duty to stay on top of the issue politically and be ready to address public concerns as the field develops.

- Ensure transparency in risk management
- Promote and continue to research alternatives to antibiotics in animal husbandry and hence tackle antibiotic resistance, and underline the rational use of all veterinary medical products
  - Risks to human health mean we need less intensive animal husbandry to promote good health and avoid routine antibiotic use, and so part of Europe's action plan to cut antibiotic resistance must include a shift to higher animal welfare farming.
- We must have fair rules applicable to EU products, with a boost in plant health controls and harmonization at the EU's external borders to avoid the entry of pests which can affect European crops.
  - The EU must ensure necessary resources so that the same rigorous standards which are applied to food produced in the EU continue to be applied to all imports.

### **2.2.3. Make organic food and quality products more visible and accessible**

- Nutritious, quality food should be available to all. Low income households should not be pushed into buying lower quality goods or be unable to buy sufficient food. Our agriculture policies should be designed to make highly nutritional food from agro-ecological or quality and sustainable production systems accessible to more people, through food support measures if needed.
- Expansion of organic agriculture can potentially create many more jobs than other types of agriculture, particularly those which are highly mechanised.
- "Single market - single legislation - single quality" The same brand with the same packaging must deliver the same quality through the whole Single market. All Europeans must be sure of getting the same quality whether they buy the brand in Bulgaria or Belgium. We must combat dual quality standards so all European citizens have access to exactly the same food products under the same label.

- Geographical Indication (GI) schemes are a successful protection tools but are not well known or used everywhere due to lack of producer awareness of the benefits they offer. They must be developed, through spread of best practice in the EU to improve consumer quality guarantees and information on origin and production methods and to maximise economic development with Member state investment.
- European GIs are now an integral part of the trade negotiations with third countries and are important for EU producers and exporters, notably for SMEs and smaller and family run farms. However, in order to help more European farmers and producers prosper across the regions, the lists of protected GIs in trade agreements should be more comprehensive, reflect a fairer geographical representation and be established through a more transparent and inclusive process.
- European mountainous, outermost and disadvantaged regions need better product visibility through implementation of the optional quality terms ‘mountain product’ and ‘island farming’ to boost agricultural development and give clearer customer information and choice.

#### **2.2.4. Combat poor diets and obesity**

- Consumers need to better understand from an early age the origins of what is on their plate, how it is produced, and how to make the healthiest food choices.
- Promoting the production and consumption of fresh produce is one part of the work in tackling ill health and poor diets.
- Food poverty is still a risk to be tackled in Europe, with many vulnerable groups unable to escape the trap. Vital NGO and food bank help needs to be co-ordinated in Member States.

#### **2.2.5. Tackle food waste**

- Reducing food waste is central to making full use of our resources, and this must be done right along the food chain “from farm to fork”, including better consumer education on “use by”, “best before”, or quality information on labels. Industry and distribution bodies also have to commit to the fight against food waste.
- The “circular economy” approach in agriculture and food production must ensure good use of by-products either on or off-farm.

## 2.3. Speed up the transition to sustainable and economically viable agriculture to meet environmental and climate challenges

- EU goals to halt diversity loss by 2020 risk not being met, with more than 80% of Natura 2000 protected grassland sites in poor condition, unfavourable conservation status for many species and habitat types, and more than half of farmland birds lost since 1980.
- Agriculture now has a key role to play in tackling pollution and habitat loss if we are to meet the 2020 goal of preventing diversity loss.
- Sixty years of increased agricultural productivity have brought with them environmental damage that must be remedied. Policy changes in the last 20 years towards sustainability have begun to address challenges, such as fertilizer dust or residue, traces of pesticide, ammonia, or methane gas.

### 2.3.1. Make agriculture an actor in the battle against climate change

- Agriculture has a key contribution to make in tackling climate change in line with international agreements, including Paris, with protection of sequestered carbon in wetlands and other ecosystems, and use of better carbon sequestering techniques such as agroforestry, and without threatening either food security or agricultural production.
- **Mitigating greenhouse gas emissions**

More than 10% of GHG emissions (methane, CO<sub>2</sub>, Nitrous Oxide) derive from agriculture and could reach up to 30% in the years to come without a significant move to new agriculture and forestry methods, and more use of extensive livestock production. In spite of its recognised limited reduction potential as regards non CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, agriculture needs to deliver its fair share of contribution towards climate change mitigation.

- **Improving adaptation to climate change**

Adaptation to climate change is essential so the agriculture sector has production options to prepare for extremes in water availability, rising temperatures, or changes in patterns of animal and plant disease

- **Ensuring sustainable production of bioenergy**

Energy and biofuel production and consumption linked to agriculture, must always be sustainable and carried out taking account of climate mitigation obligations.

- **Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals**

Europe is committed to delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals and will need to adopt a genuinely sustainable approach to food and farming in order to deliver the relevant SDGs on preventing pollution, tackling overuse of water, improving soil quality, making better use of natural resources, halting biodiversity loss as well as promoting good health and nutrition and food security.

- **Promote and develop agroforestry**

Agroforestry can greatly improve quality of life for people by improving microclimates, enhancing landscapes and providing multipurpose and recreational forest and woodland.

- **Better management of water resources**

As well as more rational use of water, the agriculture sector will need to create new sustainable methods for of water storage and ensure modernisation of irrigation systems

- **Renew land, soils and tackle land abandonment**

Boosting longer term soil fertility by agro-ecological practices will be key to sustainability and keeping land in good productive condition. Some less fertile land is now no longer being used and we must avoid this problem becoming more widespread.

### 2.3.2. Opt for Sustainable agriculture preserving biodiversity and respecting animal welfare

- **Diversify production and limit chemical inputs**

It is important to diversify production more, and encourage agro-economic practices which limit chemical inputs, progressively replacing pesticides with available alternatives.

- A strategic protein plan will be an essential plank in ensuring the security of our food supply in Europe. Instead of exporting unprocessed cereal we should use the land for vegetable proteins in crop rotation to support grass-based production systems. This will reduce dependency on imported feedstuffs whose production can lead to deforestation, and enable us to halve our protein imports.

- **Safeguard biodiversity**

The goal of '4 per 1000' drawn up at COP 21 should be adopted throughout the EU. to use practices which increase organic matter and encourage carbon-dioxide sequestration in soils, in turn improving fertility, biodiversity and levels of absorbable nutrients.

Land with nutrient rich soil and covered with vegetation is less prone to flood, mudslide or erosion, and integrated agro-ecology methods promote natural biodiversity, lower water use and avoid destroying natural habitats.

- **Protect bees and pollinators**

A European apiculture plan is urgently needed to tackle the shortage of the pollinators and in particular bees, whose primary role is the pollination which is essential for all our crop production. Pollination should be properly recognised as an agroecological service. Other elements would be: a neonicotinoid ban, strict implementation of the approval process for Plant Protection Products, and intercropping with flowering or nectar plants.

- **Promote and develop agroecology**

Agroecology brings together approaches to agriculture, food, natural habitats, scientific research and policy, which consider the environment as a resource and not a constraint. It brings a new outlook, and new areas of knowledge will bring innovation and new processes. Farmers have to be at the heart of this and be engaged in decision making to improve methods, jobs and income, and deliver a multi-functional system which brings social, economic and landscape benefits.

Methods must be overhauled to improve productivity and resilience, bolster ecosystem services, using biological process to promote agro-biodiversity and mitigate any negative impact.

Agroecology systems feature slower crop rotations including cover crops and leguminous plants, and promote more grass feeding of ruminants, reducing input use (particularly herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, antibiotics, nitrogen heavy fertilizers, and energy). These systems make the most of the benefits of combined livestock and arable production integrated with wider ecosystems and more use of trees on the land.

- **Developing environmentally friendly and competitive conventional agriculture**

Much agricultural employment today is in the conventional sector so, while agro-ecology is being developed to meet the food needs of all, conventional agriculture must continue alongside, at the same time safeguarding quality and safety standards and the environment.

We support the role that cooperatives and other forms of social economy play in bringing products to the consumer and enabling their farming partners to improve their status in the value chain and to deliver economies of scale.

We must ensure that the importance of arable and livestock farmers in maintaining social and territorial cohesion is better understood across society.

- **Take account of society's expectations on animal welfare**

Consumers want production methods which meet modern animal welfare standards and yet welfare has been shown to be poor in some parts of the intensive livestock sector.

Existing welfare legislation needs better implementation and control in line with Treaty Article 13, which recognises animals as sentient beings, and to further improve the lives of animals we also need new kinds of animal husbandry systems and better enclosures.

People are still very concerned about live animal transport, and infringements of EU Regulation 1/2005, so this needs better monitoring and control, especially for longer journey times, and including when animals are destined for non EU markets.

## **2.4. Investing in Rural: for the sake of our land and regions**

- Scarcity of agricultural land is increasing, with growing pressure on the European market. Land concentration, where acquisitions are unusually large, is more common now, and farmers often have to compete with foreign investors when trying to buy land. This adds to rural depopulation, and threatens sustainable smallholder agriculture as it is one of the main barriers encountered by young farmers starting out. We need ways of ensuring access to land for small to medium scale family farms or cooperatives to safeguard rural areas and communities.

### **2.4.1. Encourage young farmers to set up in business and people to stay in rural areas**

- The rapidly ageing profile of farmers is a huge threat to the number of farms in Europe, and could lead to further land concentration and intensification of production practices. In light of this it is crucial to support young farmers by, inter alia, on-farm advice for both the retirees and the new farmers.
- Along with competition for non-agricultural land use, the fact that older farmers are not ready to pass on land inside or outside the family is another factor in land-concentration. Many national factors (fiscal, inheritance, or family law) also impact on farm transfers, as well as access to finance.
- A new property or land-use map should start to emerge from the move towards agro-ecology, emphasising soil preservation, and helping the move towards smallholder and diversified production, and possible sustainable agricultural use of common or fallow land.

- Advisory services for young farmers are essential, on finance and investment options for holdings, good production practices, support measures, technological developments, and digital tools for agriculture and farm development.
- It is vital to keep people in the countryside if we are to have vibrant rural communities and women are key to this. Specific opportunities women, and good quality services and infrastructure must be in place and accessible to keep people there, whether they are eight or 80 years old. Education, training and work opportunities, as well as health and social services are the life support systems for rural areas and have a profound effect on whether women are inclined to stay or leave.
- Training and retraining courses for workers in agricultural sectors affected by technological change must be provided and both the Commission and the Member States have key roles to play in this
- We need to establish minimum wages, for agricultural employees as another of the contributing factors to keeping the sector and the rural areas where it operates vibrant and viable

#### **2.4.2. Promote short supply chains and local purchasing**

- Diverse production and local supply chains and networks are needed in each area to enhance local markets, and organising collectively or structuring stakeholder needs will be complement this. People seeking local and seasonal food want to use more identifiable, local producers, as a way of avoiding possible risks from the kind of food scandals they have seen. The notion of local is not fixed but often comes from an awareness of regional provenance.

### 2.4.3. Invest in rural areas

- Rural areas face specific characteristics which need specific solutions. Ageing populations, lack of services (medical, postal, health, transport and energy) and limited broadband all have to be addressed. Ensuring digital access can help sustain a healthy agriculture sector which, in turn, can help those areas defend against rural depopulation and help them retain young people. The EU should draw up a plan to combat rural depopulation by giving Rural Development policy a more comprehensive character and incorporating financial measures from different European Funds.

- Smarter rural areas and villages

Important synergies between agricultural and rural economies were highlighted in Cork 2.0 declaration “A better life in rural areas in the EU”. It recognises challenges faced by farmers and the importance of sustainable growth of both the farming sector and rural areas, to tackle rural depopulation (which is a worldwide tendency). The European Parliament brought forward the ‘Smart, Eco, Social Villages’ initiative to help deliver recommendations made in the declaration. Proposed by S&D, it aims to create a replicable, socially useful model for different types of villages, to help sustain, rebuild and develop communities in rural areas. It should promote and disseminate best practice and successful ICT/online methods linked to the Digital Single Market, promote urban-rural links, and bio-economy development (including innovation, precision farming, environmental management, renewable energies, supply chain services, and local food), and focus on quality of life and employment opportunities especially for women and young people.

Based on this, the European Commission launched the ‘EU Action for Smart Villages’, involving the European Institutions and many associations, federations, municipalities, partnerships and networks across the EU, working together to develop the attraction and sustainability of rural life. We all need to contribute to make this new concept a success!

## **2.5. Agriculture - much more than a business**

### **2.5.1. Making progress on co-operative, socially and environmentally progressive principles in our trade policy**

- Access to balanced and healthy food is the right of all Europe's citizens, and domestic production should be the priority. The countries of origin of our food imports must be able to retain sufficient quality food for their own people, and ensure decent living and working conditions. Strengthening those countries will be key to giving their young people an alternative to migration.
- Both Europe and developing countries would benefit from increased food autonomy. It is not tenable for the EU to continue to be the biggest food importing region, contributing to a vicious circle where developing countries are pushed into selling unprocessed foodstuffs, and into buying processed food from Europe, often leaving their own population malnourished
- Our trade policy should be conducted in the context of the principles and objectives of the Union's external action, notably those related to development and contribute to the re-establishment of food autonomy for each region of the world, working through a new multilateral order based on co-operation linking sustainable agricultural systems geared to better revenue stability.

### **2.5.2. We need global food self-sufficiency**

- The fundamental right to food should not be undermined by concentrating food production in certain parts of the world, to the detriment of others, leaving almost two billion people without enough to eat.
- A world of nine billion people is forecast and, to feed them all, we need an ambitious and fair trade policy which rejects land-grabbing, and a development policy which supports sustainable production, reduces food waste, and supports food autonomy in developing countries. European agricultural and trade policies must be formulated in coherence with sustainable development policy. The impact of European agriculture policy on food production capacity and long term food security in developing countries, in particular of the least developed countries (LDCs), must be subject to regular and independent assessments, paying special attention to the

impact on local and smallholder producers. Consequently, future trade agreements should promote the economic independence of LDCs.

**Food is the basis of life and not a mere commodity. The right to food comes above any commercial consideration. Only together can we meet the environmental, climatic and food challenges of the 21st century by revolutionising our agricultural model. Europe must regain its leadership role once again and become the driving force that the world needs so much today.**

- **a leadership role in globally sustainable agriculture**
- **closer synergy between healthy agriculture and human health**
- **agriculture integrated and contributing to lively rural areas**
- **a new relationship between international trade and agriculture**