



## **The European Union needs a coherent strategy for food and agriculture**

**The objectives of the F2F strategy are sufficient, now we must make them a reality**

**For the attention of Mr Frans Timmermans, Vice-President and Commissioner for Climate Change**

**Mrs Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health,**

**Mr Wojciechowski, Commissioner for Agriculture,**

**Mr Sinkevičius, Commissioner for the Environment**

**and Members of the European Parliament.**

13 October 2021, Brussels

**Dear Representatives of the European Commission and Parliament,**

ECVC has long since been in favour of a "Common Agriculture and Food Policy", i.e. a comprehensive strategy to preserve and develop sustainable agriculture in Europe. This common policy would produce enough healthy food to feed the European population, drastically reduce GHG emissions from agriculture and food systems, preserve and restore biodiversity in the fields and in nature, create more and better job opportunities for people in rural areas, and improve the incomes and working conditions of farmers and farm workers.

The Farm to Fork strategy seems to be a promising first step in the direction of this more holistic vision of agriculture, which takes into account the aspects of food linked to public health and the social and environmental issues of agricultural production.

Over the last few weeks, ECVC has witnessed the numerous attacks aimed at weakening the EU Farm to Fork Strategy. On the occasion of the Second Conference on the Farm to Fork Strategy, organised on 14 and 15 October 2021 by the Commission, it is essential for us to recall the importance of such a strategy.

ECVC wishes to express its support for the Farm to Fork Strategy, but also to raise concerns about the trend to focus on technological solutions in certain narratives surrounding the strategy and to point out the need to put in place solid regulatory tools in order to achieve the objectives. These tools are long overdue, yet entirely essential to achieve the strategy's objectives.

### **Unfounded attacks on the Farm to Fork Strategy**

Within the studies conducted by the USDA, COCERAL, or the JRC it is acknowledged that none of said studies are able to encapsulate the complexity of reforming food systems as described in the Farm to Fork Strategy. These studies are deaf to the need to address climate and environmental emergencies. None of them calculate the environmental, societal and economic costs of inaction.

The various studies suggest there is a risk that the Farm to Fork Strategy will lead to a significant drop in European agricultural production and thus to increased risks of food crises. This ignores the fact that food production in Europe, and across the world, is overwhelmingly based on a dense network of small and medium-sized farms. These farms are weakened by the current trend towards the industrialisation of agricultural production and the globalisation of trade. Reorienting the European Union's agricultural policy towards more territorialised food systems based on agroecology is an important opportunity to support farmers in all European territories and thus guarantee sufficient and sustainable food production for today and for the future.

**With this in mind, it is time to get to work, together, to achieve the goals of the F2F Strategy, as there is still a long way to go. While the Commission is in the midst of working on its Legislative Framework on Sustainable Food Systems, announced for 2023, ECVC asks it to focus on the following points:**

**1. Supporting the path towards greater sustainability and clear steps towards agroecology.**

It is time to put in place real support for food production, distribution and consumption to promote agroecology. The EU Biodiversity Strategy presents agroecology as a way to "provide healthy food while maintaining productivity, increase soil fertility and biodiversity, and reduce the footprint of food production". The latest report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) presents it as an "agri-environmental scheme [capable of] mitigating some of the adverse effects of intensive agriculture" (2019)<sup>1</sup>. In contrast to industrial agriculture the principles of agroecological production methods include low external energy use, renewable energy, and production and harvesting methods that maximise the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience, biodiversity and climate adaptation. Agroecology must be promoted in a context of food sovereignty, which seeks to enable every citizen to have access to healthy, good quality food that aligns with their personal choices, as well as allowing farmers to earn a dignified living from their work. Several studies support that a European agroecological food production model is possible and can feed Europe <sup>2</sup>.

It is important that DG AGRI, DG CLIMATE, DG HEALTH and DG ENVI, which are the main DGs involved in the agricultural elements of the Green Deal, exchange on coherent approaches allowing a transition towards agroecology and food sovereignty.

**2. Curbing the race towards new technological solutions and preserving the precautionary principle. Focus on ensuring Europe has a large number of farmers.**

We are very suspicious of and strongly question the current path towards the digitalisation of food production. This digitalisation, through the promotion of a new generation of Genetically Modified Organisms, precision agriculture, pesticides, the use of drones and remote sensing are only driving industrial models. The consequences of their use are often unpredictable and have generally proven to be harmful not only to the environment, but also to society and health. In addition to increased energy demand, it leads to a decrease in rural employment, rural depopulation and desertification. It changes the relationship of farmers to the land, depriving them of free will over their territory and their objects of work. These solutions seem to be ineffective in meeting the environmental, climatic and societal challenges that the objectives of the Green Deal aim to overcome. From these points of view, it is alarming to see that while delays are being made in the implementation of key elements of

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<sup>1</sup> IPBES (2018): Summary for policymakers of the regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Europe and Central Asia of the IPBES. M. Fischer, et al. (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

<sup>2</sup> In particular the TYFA scenario (Ten years for Agroecology), see Xavier Poux and Pierre-Marie Aubert, *Demain une Europe agroécologique*, Actes Sud; but also the scientific article written by Gilles Billen and published in *One Earth* <https://www.cnrs.fr/fr/une-agriculture-biologique-pour-nourrir-leurope-en-2050>; Agrimonde scenario quoted in particular in *La Faim dans le monde*, directed by Delphine Thivet and Antoine Bernard de Raymond

the legislative processes of the Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Commission is rushing to review Directive 2001-18 on genetically modified organisms<sup>3</sup>. This proposed revision aims to deregulate certain new GMO techniques on the basis of undocumented claims of sustainability, in clear contradiction to both the key objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy and the EU's precautionary principle. Farmers will be the first to pay the price of potential deregulation and this attempt must be stopped.

On the contrary, the European Institutions should make the most of the rich and diverse nature of European peasant and family farming. The vast majority of European farms are small and medium-sized<sup>4</sup>. These farms produce most of our food, with diversified production methods, particularly mixed farming and livestock, and are very firmly rooted in the local area. They create jobs in rural areas. Despite the low level of public support for them, a large proportion of these farms are already committed to agroecological practices. A greater public regulation of markets and a reorientation of agricultural subsidies towards these small and medium-sized farms could allow farmers to engage more easily in the transition towards sustainable models. We also encourage the European Commission to work on a directive on land issues, in order to guarantee access to land for young farmers and new entrants. Indeed, the main challenge for the future of European agriculture is to maintain and re-establish a large number of farmers in all EU territories.

### **3. Working towards food sovereignty and stopping free trade agreements and the deregulation of agricultural markets**

Considering the impacts of European food policies on global governance, environment, climate and populations, the EU must take up this responsibility and must radically curb international free trade agreements, changing the way food and non-food agricultural products are imported and exported, in order to favour regional and local production and to recover food sovereignty in Europe and in each country. This must be done through international cooperation and solidarity, to allow other countries around the world to strengthen their own production.

ECVC was extremely disappointed that the negotiations on the future Common Agricultural Policy did not successfully evaluate the tools to be put in place to achieve the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy. The European Common Market must ensure fair prices for farmers, in order to guarantee a decent income that can cover the costs of quality food production and decent and sufficient wages for rural workers. CAP subsidies should be radically reoriented to both reward farmers involved in agroecological production, and to support those who are committed to a transition towards greater sustainability.

In order to provide citizens with food that is good quality, healthy and respectful of their choices as consumers, it is fundamental that farmers be able to work in good conditions and with dignity. For this, the European Union must commit itself to the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other Rural Workers<sup>5</sup> (UNDROP), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018. We draw your attention to Article 16, the right of peasants to an adequate standard of living and access to means of production. We call on the Commission to include the guarantee of access to human rights, including those of UNDROP, in its legislative framework on sustainable food systems.

### **4. Guarantee the effective participation of farmers' organisations and the populations concerned**

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<sup>3</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13119-Legislation-applicable-aux-vegetaux-produits-a-l%E2%80%99aide-de-certaines-nouvelles-techniques-genomiques\\_fr](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13119-Legislation-applicable-aux-vegetaux-produits-a-l%E2%80%99aide-de-certaines-nouvelles-techniques-genomiques_fr)

<sup>4</sup>According to Eurostat 2020, 77% of European farms are smaller than 10 hectares.

<sup>5</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694>

The success of the Farm to Fork Strategy depends largely on the EU's ability to effectively include the populations concerned in the political and legislative processes.

ECVC is concerned that, too often in its processes concerning agriculture and food, the EU gives considerable space to industry and large-scale distribution, and undermines that of organisations representing workers and disadvantaged populations. It is unacceptable, for example, that most documents concerning agricultural and food policies are available only in English, which makes them inaccessible to the vast majority of European citizens, and in particular to small-scale producers.

It is therefore imperative that small-scale producers' organisations, such as ECVC, are consulted and heard. Similarly, organizations that represent groups or individuals that struggle to access quality food must be included in this debate.