



ECVC SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON PEASANT FARMING

APRIL 2020

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of the Covid 19 pandemic, ECVC wanted to conduct a survey among its members to find out how this serious health situation is affecting the work of both the organisations and peasant farming in each country.

The Covid-19 pandemic is first and foremost a very serious public health problem that is causing hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide.

To eradicate the pandemic, governments have taken very strict measures such as containment and cessation of non-essential economic activities, for example in the HORECA sector (hotel, restaurant and catering), public and private canteens, and non-essential shops and markets.

In addition, due to the crisis, people have changed some of their consumption habits, tending to buy more from large stores, where they can buy a wide variety of products at the same time, as well as opting for more processed and longer-lasting foods. Furthermore, some food products, such as cheese and wine, have shown significant drops in consumption.

The peasant farming sector is also being affected by this crisis, mainly due to the lack of access to its usual markets.

With this survey ECVC aims to make a first assessment of the extent of these measures and their impact on the work of our members both in terms of organizations and work in the fields and know what minimization measures countries are taking.

It aims to bring to the attention of the European Institutions and the national authorities the consequences of the crisis and the measures adopted for smallholder agriculture, so that better adapted measures can be taken quickly, in this this sector and others, to minimize the impact and avoid the worst case scenario for peasant agriculture: the disappearance of more farmers.

It is urgent to stop the consequences of this crisis, the magnitude of which is still beyond our reach.



DATA AND METHODS

The survey has analysed the impact of the Covid-19 crisis in European countries where ECVC members operate. The variables studied were:

- The impact of the crisis on the ECVC member organisations;
- The impact in their country and specifically on peasant farming;
- The measures that the countries and the EU should take to support peasant farming in the face of this crisis.

We have collected the data through a questionnaire sent to ECVC members via email on the 18th of March, open until the 31st March. We then gathered all the answers in a single document.

We have subsequently analysed the data and we will present the summarized outcomes in this report.

RESULTS

We have analysed the responses of 18 ECVC members: 13 have responded directly to the questionnaires; 5 have asked to extrapolate the responses from their press releases and analyses.

Responses received via the ECVC questionnaire:

- ✓ AbL - Germany
- ✓ Ciftci-Sen - Turkey
- ✓ CNA - Portugal
- ✓ Ecoruralis - Romania
- ✓ ESVY RY - Finland
- ✓ Frie Bonder - Denmark
- ✓ FUGEA - Belgium
- ✓ Life - Croatia
- ✓ LWA - United Kingdom
- ✓ MAP - Belgium
- ✓ NBS - Norway
- ✓ OBV - Austria
- ✓ Uniterre - Switzerland



Responses extrapolated from communications and other documents published by the organization:

- ✓ ARI - Italy
- ✓ Boerenforum - Belgium
- ✓ COAG - Spain
- ✓ Confederation Paysanne- France
- ✓ SOC SAT - Spain

IMPACT ON ECVC MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Confinement, be it more or less rigid, governs in all of the countries of our respondents. Non-essential economic activities have been stopped and the displacement of the population has been reduced to the indispensable minimum.

The majority of ECVC members have reacted to the crisis by assessing the impact of the situation among their own members and then sending press releases and analysis documents to the competent authorities to request immediate and adequate measures for small and medium family farming to cope with the Covid-19 crisis.

Since the beginning of the crisis, communication activity towards the outside, mainly the governmental authorities, and towards the members of their own organizations, has increased for almost all our members. Some members frequently inform their member organisations about the evolution of the crisis and one member has even written a guide for their members on how to act in the face of the crisis.

All respondents have had to cancel and postpone certain types of activities and transform physical meetings into virtual meetings; most of our members' secretarial teams are working in homeoffices.

A few members have reported financial loss looming on the horizon due to the financial loss of their own members or due to a significant decrease in the provision of services to its members, for example, in terms of training actions. All this involves political, financial and legal uncertainty. Some members report the cancellation of meetings, general assemblies, public events and, therefore, the financial losses that this entails, such as airline tickets that were previously purchased.



IMPACT ON THE COUNTRIES AND SPECIFICALLY ON PEASANT FARMING

All respondents have reported financial loss for their own members due to the closure of restaurants, canteens, tourist establishments, schools, etc., or the banning of events, such as weddings or other events, to which they deliver part of their production of meat, fruit, and vegetables.

The loss is also due to the ban on holding open-air markets, with some variability depending on the country.

Outdoor market situation

In Italy, in the anti Covid-19 Decree "Cura Italia", it is stipulated that markets are closed, no matter which type of activity is carried out, with the exception of activities aimed at selling only food products.

In France, food markets remain prohibited, unless expressly exempted. A food market may be authorised by the municipality, at the request of the mayor, in accordance with the derogation provided in the Decree of the 23rd of March.

In Belgium, all local markets are banned except for food stalls in areas where they are essential, and except for stalls essential for the supply of food to areas with no commercial food infrastructure. Each city decides on this last point.

In Switzerland, markets have been banned. The Federal Council has decided to close all markets until further notice. This restriction has also reduced the possibility of delivering vegetable baskets to the usual delivery points. However, a new ordinance issued by the Federal Health Office on the 25th of March seems to leave some room for holding a stand in a market.

In Spain, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, the United Kingdom and Croatia open-air markets, including food markets, are prohibited by national law.

In Germany and Portugal, the decision is left to the regional authorities and some cities have closed their weekly local markets, although it is very important for people to get fresh, local food and for farmers to sell their produce.

In Romania, the government has decided to keep the local markets open. Despite the national authorisation to keep markets open, local authorities or private administrators of local markets have acted in different ways, varying from place to place. However, farmers over 65 are no longer allowed to sell in the markets.



In Austria, a "corona law" stipulates that direct marketing of food products and farmers' markets are allowed, but some farmers' markets have been closed by local authorities.

Alternatives are being introduced

Producers have started home sales, deliveries to hospitals, online sales, increasing sales through short channels, farmer's shops and farm markets.

Most of the responses therefore indicate an increase in sales via short channels, which sometimes makes it difficult to cope with the increase in demand.

Situation on the agricultural activity

In some countries, travel is so difficult that farmers who do not live on their farms cannot get to their fields, nor they can get supplies (Portugal).

In some countries, the ban on people over 65 on leaving their homes particularly affects agriculture as most of farmers are over that age (Romania, Turkey, and Portugal).

For food producers in general, there is a great deal of uncertainty about crop plans because we don't know how long the crisis will last, what their consumer profile will be, and what outlets will be available.

Labour force

The lack of labour force to work in the fields is looming. Migrant and seasonal workers will find it difficult to travel. Farms that depend on many of these workers, such as large farms, will find it difficult. The crisis shows how fragile these large-scale farms are.

A shortage of labour is likely to be felt for small farms as well. In some countries, online ads to help work in the fields have been put out. These advertisements are aimed at the general population but especially at people who are unemployed. In some countries (i.e. Germany) online platforms have been set up to link citizens willing to help and producers needing help.

For agricultural workers, migrant or not, some replies have pointed out that measures are necessary to guarantee the life and health of these workers and to protect their rights at work. Some stakeholders want to weaken labour rights so that workers are allowed to work more hours a day and to take shorter breaks.

Price cuts and speculation

The price crisis is looming. Even if alternatives for the sale of agricultural products are put in place, the loss of sales and marketing channels remains significant. As a consequence, members are reporting a drop in prices mainly for the following products:

- Milk



The trend shows a significant increase in milk supply at EU level, accompanied by a retraction of the demand. Restricted milk trade has engulfed internal trade opportunities. The increase in milk supply results in milk prices falling. Some dairy factories call on their farmers to produce less milk so that prices do not fall too drastically.

In the case of the dairy goat farming, the situation is sometimes complicated. Because of the closure of some dairy factories and a drop in consumption, the demand for goat milk for cheese production is lower. There is a significant increase in the supply of goat milk at the EU level, accompanied by a decrease in demand (Spain, Italy, Portugal).

- Meat

The sheep and goat sectors are heavily affected. The Easter period is usually busy, but there will be difficulties in selling lambs (France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Romania).

In cattle sector, the cessation of collective catering and open markets is hitting livestock farmers, especially organic. A drop in the price of meat from these animals is expected in the short and medium term (France, Spain).

MEASURES REQUESTED BY OUR MEMBERS FROM GOVERNMENTS

- Food sovereignty is more important than ever. Agriculture and peasant work have a systemic relevance - the alternative to this situation involves defending the country's food sovereignty, increasing national production and expanding the network and equipment of local markets (mentioned in all the responses).
- Re-open open-air markets to sell agricultural products, encourage local sales and home delivery, while ensuring the safety measure (mentioned in all the responses).
- Territorial purchase obligation for hospitals, barracks, and other communities.
- Avoid delays in granting residence and work permits for seasonal workers.
- Request an advance of CAP subsidies and pay the total balance of CAP 2019.
- For the Debt of Agricultural Enterprises, specific intervention is requested for exposures below €50,000: block of loans, taxes, and so on should be extended to farmers throughout the country, even if they are not classified as "entrepreneurs" because they have micro-farms.
- Guarantee fast credit lines with an interest rate of up to 1% to finance the upcoming spring sowing.
- Reprogram and freeze loan repayment until the end of the crisis.



- Secure and maintain the operations of slaughterhouses, cutting rooms, dairies, farm equipment repairers, and feed supply stores.
- The mobility of farmers, especially the smallest ones, must always be ensured or even facilitated by the authorities.
- A compulsory reduction in milk volumes should be introduced now as a matter of urgency.
- Corporate efforts to patent seeds and modify their genes should be prevented in order to avoid hunger and future virus outbreaks.

THE CRISIS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The short-term measures that the EU should take in terms of agricultural policy as reported by answers are as follows:

- To support and attract people who are now unemployed to the work in agro-ecological food production.
- Provide substantial financial support to facilitate the entry of new farmers and young farmers into agriculture. This is more necessary than ever.
- Food production must rapidly become an attractive sector of the economy from the point of view of generating decent incomes to ensure generational renewal.
- EU market observatories must play a crucial role in regulating and maintaining fair prices for agricultural products. These observatories should coordinate and step up their efforts to monitor and create transparency in EU food markets and report on price speculation that already tends to occur in the retail sector.
- Migrant and seasonal workers must be protected. No disruption of national blockades or quarantine should be allowed in the EU.
- Creation of a special fund to support agriculture.
- Mitigating the criteria for obtaining de minimum State aid.
- Advance payment of direct payments for 2020.
- Provide additional incentives to farmers who sell locally.
- Basic income support for small farmers.
- Access to markets and creation of new opportunities for peasant farmers.
- Support the transition to peasant agroecology.
- Urgent action needed for the milk market which is at risk of collapse.
- Large-scale animal production should be discouraged as soon as possible, as large concentrations of animals and the use of antimicrobials promote the evolution of pathogenic bacteria and viruses.

- The EU must relax the rules on aid payments to farmers, for example by requiring the Member States to carry out a minimum level of control. There must be flexibility in the time limits linked to cross-compliance and the sending of papers to the administration, given that several services are functioning only online.
- The EU will then have to assess the losses for the agricultural sector and put in place adapted solutions in order to guarantee an income for our farmers in 2020.
- In the longer term, the agricultural policy must support an autonomous and relocated agricultural system, drawing lessons from the current crisis.
- Turn to short chains and local food, supporting family farming.
- Public regulation of markets for the concerned productive sectors.
- Modify the values to activate public withdraw of agricultural products from the market and extend this instrument to more sectors.
- Amend competition rules to impose prices on producers and consumers where necessary.
- Establish financing lines for private storage for small-scale food producers.

CONCLUSIONS

In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the measures taken by the governments of the ECVC member countries that responded to the survey showed that they often have not taken into account peasant agriculture and the sale of its products as the restriction/banning of outdoor markets, and the restriction of movement of people together with the closure of HORECA sector (hotel, restaurant and catering) establishments including agritourism, severely limited the flow of products.

Health and safety measures that could have been put in place for outdoor markets have not been evaluated nor implemented, and as a result, supermarkets have benefited. The only exception would be the increase in direct sales between producers and consumers through short channels (such as GASAP/AMAP/GAS/CSA - direct sales to small food shops and stalls, vegetable boxes etc), as well as alternatives such as online sales and home delivery, alternatives which must be financially supported by the authorities and encouraged among the population as they guarantee healthy and balanced products provided by peasant agriculture.

Given further issues which are already looming on the horizon, such as falling incomes and lower consumption, the imbalance between supply and demand is already being experienced, for instance in the milk sector in which prices per litre are falling. Requests for crisis management tools,



appropriate to this unprecedented crisis, are urgently demanded to the national and European authorities.

But above all our members have declared that, once again, this latest crisis shows that Food Sovereignty is more important than ever. Agriculture and peasant work have a systemic relevance and the food sovereignty of the country must be defended, the national production capacity must be increased as well as the expansion of the networks and equipment of local markets.
