



April 16, 2020

## OPEN LETTER

### ***Supporting Peasants - a Priority for Food Security (and) in the context of the COVID-19 crisis!***

**A series of measures for the Government and the Parliament of Romania - from the small producers together with civil society organizations and researchers in the field of agriculture and food.**

*If we are currently facing a health crisis, the reality around us shows that there is a risk of having to face a food crisis. Women and Men Peasants, small and medium-sized local producers, family farms in Romania and around the world ensure access to food both in their villages, in their families and in the cities of proximity. The short food chains and the local economy not only provide fresh and healthy food, but they also represent the solution to this crisis, which is announced to be a prolonged one. Also, their support is an important long-term local development opportunity and a safety net for potential other crisis situations.*

We consider it particularly important that the public authorities keep the open peasant markets still functioning, safely adapted to the pandemic. We need the continued support of the authorities, so that producers can continue to come to markets and sell in hygienic and safe conditions, both for themselves and for consumers. These public peasant markets are the main way of directly selling products from small producers. They are important because they provide food at fair prices for producers as well as consumers, including people from vulnerable groups and the elderly with reduced pensions. Also, the many alternative initiatives for direct delivery from producers to consumers, as well as local and regional food projects, demonstrate the relevance and sustainability of short food chains.

**Given the undeniable capacity of peasants and small producers to feed consumers, but also the risks associated with the Coronavirus pandemic, public policies must now focus on supporting both small producers, peasants as well as the vulnerable population (especially the elderly), to combat the consequences of the crisis. In this regard, the signatories of this open letter propose concrete measures to the government and the relevant authorities that can be implemented in the next period.**

#### **I. Market access and agricultural activity of small producers:**

1. Keeping direct selling points open, with priority the local peasant markets in cities or villages, as well as the agricultural shops, throughout Romania, during the whole Covid-19 crisis period. Prioritizing small producers (instead of intermediaries) in peasant markets, both publicly or privately administrated. We also propose that funds be allocated at local and national level by mayors, local councils, private market administrations and the Government - for the hygiene and safety of producers, including protective equipment (masks, gloves, suits, disinfectants, etc.). Last but not least, it is necessary to publicly promote the open markets as a viable and secure food supply alternative for consumers to feed themselves also during the crisis.

2. Supporting and Promoting Short Local Supply Chains such as individual and group home food sales initiatives, organized by small producers:

a) by allowing self-organization of fixed and mobile distribution points, in compliance with the Covid-19 spread prevention rules;

b) by making available by the local authorities of adequate spaces and covering the costs of their operation during the restrictions related to Covid 19 and at least 3 months thereafter.

3. Supporting pastoral producers, who are particularly more affected by restrictions against Covid-19, respectively small ruminants (sheep and goats) and beekeepers, in order to carry out their activities of transhumance, herding and access to market.

4. Maintaining the payment schedule for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by assisting subsidy beneficiaries offline and online. Also, the reduction of VAT and other taxes for small and medium-sized producers.

5. Regulating and capping markup for basic food, to avoid speculative operations that could deepen the food crisis. At the same time, guaranteeing correct product pricing by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and by the institutions empowered by the Ministry, established after consultation with the producer associations.

6. The Ministry of Agriculture should be making public investments with contributions at county/local level in order to develop storage and processing infrastructure for small producers. These investments are of critical importance, playing a strategic role for medium and long term resilience of national food chains. This infrastructure should allow the storage and processing of vegetables, fruits, cereals, dairy and other products, to a larger number of small producers, thus increasing market access for them, as well as access to healthy, fresh and local food for consumers.

7. Updating and improving the regulations on public procurement, to allow / facilitate public procurement that favors the supply of short food chains for institutional use (hospitals, institutional canteens, asylums, etc.), with the extension of this system to schools, kindergartens, nurseries and others public institutions, with their reopening.

8. Reintroducing (and monitoring) the obligation that large food stores get their supply from short food chains.

## **II. The problem of agricultural workers**

9. The Romanian Government should take responsibility for the safety of seasonal migrant workers in agriculture and food. It should guarantee the implementation of all COVID-19 prevention measures by the Government of Romania and the Governments of the host countries requesting migrant seasonal workers throughout the crisis. All state institutions, recruitment agencies and companies or farms involved in recruitment, in carrying out employment contracts, in transporting and carrying out the actual work of seasonal workers in agriculture and food have the obligation to monitor and implement all COVID-19 preventive measures from the moment of departure from Romania and until returning to the country, including the following specific measures:

a) Regulation of charter flights for the transport of seasonal workers so that all COVID-19 prevention measures are implemented; this involves the provision of personnel at the level of national airports to ensure maintenance and respect of COVID-19 prevention measures among citizens scheduled to leave for seasonal work in other states;

b) The obligation of the recruitment agencies and the employers seeking seasonal work force to inform and to provide the necessary means to the migrant seasonal workers regarding the measures to prevent COVID-19 during the process of employment, travel and during the actual work period and stay in host countries;

c) Public and private commitments at bilateral level between Romania and the host countries of seasonal workers to respect and implement all the measures to prevent COVID-19 (eg, checks at the level of employers, farms by the authorities empowered from the host countries);

d) Establish a GreenCall phonenumber where seasonal workers can report violation of measures to prevent COVID-19 by employers in the host countries.

10. Strengthening efforts to solve repatriation cases for Romanian citizens - seasonal migrant workers in agriculture, food and other essential services, citizens trapped in the host countries, who lost their jobs and signaled the need for repatriation assistance, finding themselves in difficult situations.

11. Protecting agricultural workers by maintaining jobs and related incomes, which will ensure a continuation of their activity in the emergency situation, in order to guarantee the health and food safety of all citizens.

### **III. Improving the transparency of decision-making and including small producers and civil society in making short-term and forward-looking decisions**

12. Include participation of small producers (directly and through their representatives from civil society in the field of agriculture and food) to the making of decisions regarding food security and safety in the context of the Covid-19 crisis, also for long-term development of this sector, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant authorities at regional and local level.

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It is time, now more than ever, for the Romanian Government and Parliament to understand that local, healthy, nutritious food obtained by small producers and peasants, as well as the population's right to access it, at affordable price, means a strong local economy and sustainable food security. .

In the hope of opening a constructive dialogue, in which we can detail these measures and other proposals for the medium and long term, and integrate them in the strategies / actions of the Government and the Ministry.

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#### **Open letter written and disseminated by:**

Eco Ruralis Association – supporting ecological and traditional peasants ([www.ecoruralis.ro](http://www.ecoruralis.ro))

ROMAPIS – Federation of Beekeepers Associations România ([www.romapis.ro](http://www.romapis.ro))

ASAT Association for the Support of Peasant Agriculture ([www.asatromania.ro](http://www.asatromania.ro))

Rural Being Association – The Peasant Box initiative ([www.cutiataranului.ro](http://www.cutiataranului.ro))

WWF România ([www.wwf.ro](http://www.wwf.ro))

Sustainable Hosman Association ([www.moara-veche.ro](http://www.moara-veche.ro))

Slow Food Cluj Transilvania

Rural Development Research Platform ([www.rdrp.ro](http://www.rdrp.ro))

JustFood: From Alternative Food Networks to Socio-Environmental Justice, FCT Research Project (<https://ces.uc.pt/projetos/justfood/en/>)

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