



WEBINAR “FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE FARM TO FORK STRATEGY: Building a fairer and more just agricultural model in the EU”

7 July 2020, 15h-17h

Summary report

On the 7th of July 2020, ECVC organised the webinar "Food Sovereignty and the Farm to Fork Strategy: Building a fairer and more just agricultural model in the EU". The webinar was organised in order to explore the potential for Food Sovereignty to reshape the EU agricultural and food policies, in particular under the framework of the proposed Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy and the current Covid19 pandemic.

The webinar was organised around a panel of three speakers representing farmers' organisations (ECVC), the European and Central Asia food sovereignty movement (Nyéléni-ECA) and scientific experts.

After their presentations, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski reacted to the panel and interacted through a dialogue with the other speakers guided by the questions posed by the public.

ECVC was happy to hear that during the conference the EU Commissioner for Agriculture showed understanding for small and medium scale farmers' positions for improving and changing the EU agricultural model towards a more sustainable and fairer model. The commissioner stated the importance of re-localising the production and reducing the role that international trade plays in the food and farming sector.

ECVC hopes that in the future concrete measure will be taken for putting the F2F strategy and the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform on the right track both for farmers and citizens.

Below you can find the video of the complete webinar and a short report of the different presentations held during the webinar, including some highlights from the discussion.

[You can watch the video of the webinar here](#)

Report of the webinar



What Food Sovereignty means in practice for the European context, including the current debate on the F2F strategy, the EU trade policy and the CAP Reform by Geneviève Savigny, a farmer in South of France and representative of the European Coordination Via Campesina.

As representatives of small and medium farmers' organisations engaged in the sustainable development of peasant agroecology, Genevieve Savigny stated that ECVC is happy to see the proposal of the European Commission (EC) of a Green Deal (GD) including the F2F strategy.

For Ms. Savigny, we are assisting in an evolution of the global vision: the focus is now on Food. With the coronavirus crisis, more emphasis has been put on the resilience of family food systems. Yet, despite being valued more in the principles of the strategy, there is the concern that, in the implementation of the F2F measures, small and medium farmers will be excluded instead of integrated and supported. Moreover, it is important to see how the F2F vision will be implemented in the different EU policies involved, especially in the CAP.

Ms. Savigny also stressed the real meaning of peasant agroecology: less specialization, more integration of crops-animals, more crop rotation, less intensification of animal productions, more production of local fruits and vegetables, less dependency on imports, more protein autonomy.

For Ms. Savigny, a transition of the whole agriculture sector requires:

- A clear vision of the future of farming in Europe.
- A stable and fair income to ALL farmers (80% of EU subsidies go to 20% of the farmers when 50% of the 6.2 million farms receiving direct payments get less than 1250 euros per year).
- A stronger focus on the incorporation of youth in farming.

In particular, in the context of the current CAP reform proposal there are many concerns:

CAP will have to be organised within the National Strategic Plans and will have to follow the EC recommendations, but how? Important measures are supposed to be found in the eco-scheme, part of pillar 1 (direct payments per hectare) and the measures of Rural development (pillar 2).

Fruit and vegetable production: many young farmers start up horticulture production on small areas. There is a growing demand for fresh products but those get little support or none. The start is difficult, and they should be granted monthly income support for the first year. Are the EU institutions thinking about that?

For the dairy production there is little flexibility, and the sector is very dependent on downstream industry. This sector suffers dramatically from drops in consumption or



overproduction, which causes dramatic drops of prices. Strong and rapid market measures are needed. Europe is rich in local cheeses that are part of the European culture.

For Pastoralism there is a need to point out this specific type of animal production, where animals like sheep, cows, goats use rough grazing or other marginal lands. Will they be fully recognised in the CAP?

There are also some concerns about the F2F strategy:

Trade: local production should be the focus and the EU should stop promoting an export and import oriented agricultural model. Often imported products do not comply with EU regulations and the F2F strategy (this is a contradiction) and they lead to lower prices for EU farmers (lower incomes and no subsidies to compensate). But it is also the case that exports from Europe have a very negative impact on local peasants in third countries.

Regarding land, the F2F strategy should try to do more and tackle the issue of land concentration and artificialisation which today is a big issue in Europe. Additionally, this phenomenon prevents young people from becoming farmers.

Regarding digitalisation, although this could be a possible tool, it could also be a dangerous one. High risks exist of further loss of autonomy, loss of data control, increased debts and lower income for small farmers.

Finally, Food sovereignty is about democratizing the food systems: for ECVC, in the F2F strategy there is no mechanism to organize a broad participation and the inclusion of the most vulnerable stakeholders, from the most precarious consumer to the smallest farmer.

Ms Savigny also dedicated a few words to the EU budget and the recovery fund, next EU generation. For Ms. Savigny there is a clear risk that most of the invested money will be used to increase industrialization of agriculture and the power of large companies in the farming sector instead of supporting the smallest farmers.

Food systems at the centre of society by Jogoda Munič, director of Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE), member of the Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Movement (Nyéléni ECA)

Ms. Munič started her presentation by introducing the Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network (Nyéléni ECA) which brings together small-scale farmers, fisher people, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, consumers, NGOs, food and agricultural workers' unions, environmental, development, research and Justice/Solidarity/Human Rights organizations, community-based food movements and others, to enhance existing food sovereignty initiatives and strengthen our work at local, national, regional and global levels.



For Ms. Munič intensive agriculture has created the conditions for viruses like Covid-19 to spread.

On one side she welcomed the F2F strategy and declared that some of the proposed actions are useful; on the other side she claimed that the strategy is not ambitious enough to deliver the real systemic change needed and remains embedded in an outdated framework. According to her, there is a need to move beyond the (green) economic growth paradigm.

The F2F strategy fails to recognize that there are various food systems and production models in Europe and that issues such as pesticide and anti-microbial use, excess fertilization, biodiversity loss, labour exploitation, and unhealthy diet promotion are linked to the industrial food system. The strategy presents techno-fixes to improve sustainability instead of tackling the root causes of problems. We need a radical shift towards a policy framework based on the realization of the right to food and nutrition, food sovereignty and peasant agroecology.

For the Nyéléni-ECA network, new GMOs cannot be part of sustainable food systems and they cannot be deregulated.

Despite the fact that reduction targets for pesticides, synthetic fertilisers, antibiotics are present in the strategy, the language around those remains vague.

The strategy does not question either trade policies or Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

The strategy does not include social conditionality and respect for human rights, including [the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas \(UNDROP\)](#), adopted in 2018, in all FTAs and in the CAP.

The EC sees the CAP reform proposal as compatible with the GD and the F2F strategy. For Nyeleni-ECA, the current CAP has shown that it is incapable of delivering fair income for producers, keeping the smallest farms in business and delivering at the same time to environmental objectives. It needs a radical reform otherwise F2F will be a missed opportunity.

The F2F strategy fails to recognise the role played by peasants in agricultural biodiversity (peasants' seed systems).

There is a lack of targets in the reduction of stocks of animals in industrial farms. The strategy remains rather silent on mobile pastoralism and extensive livestock systems.

The F2F strategy presents aquaculture as a sustainable solution to overfishing but neglects the fact that the pressure can be shifted to wild fish stocks that are used for fish meal to feed farmed fish. Another neglected issue is the social consequences of transitioning to capital intensive aquaculture.



Research and Innovation (R&I) is framed as overtly technical, overlooking social innovation, social science, and humanities research.

In the strategy there are no measures that tackle land concentration (especially in Eastern Europe).

The importance of Food Sovereignty for the Farm to Fork strategy and the New Green Deal – Jessica Duncan, Associate Professor, Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University

For Professor Duncan, there are five interconnected reflections with a view towards advancing sustainable food systems transformations in the framework of the F2F strategy:

The importance of changing how food systems are framed: there is a need to move beyond the economic growth frame, as advanced by the European Green Deal, and the Farm to Fork Strategy. This means replacing the frame of food as a commodity with the frame of food as a common good but also changing the frame to allow for the inclusion of multiple perspectives. Opening up to diverse perspectives can open up challenges to business-as-usual through asserting a greater diversity of (positioned) knowledges related to food systems.

There is a genuine need to acknowledge and account for diversity: diversity in ecosystems; in food producers (including small-scale and family farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and urban food producers); in who informs policy and who makes policy; in governance mechanisms; in science.

Thirdly it is important to pay attention to poorly defined concepts, or buzz words risk becoming so-called ‘fuzz words’ : the objectives of the Strategy need to be more clearly defined and parameters need to be drawn. There is an urgent need to do the hard and deeply political work of delineating key concepts to avoid a replication of the same systems that we are now trying to transition away from.

Fourthly, research and innovation have a key role to play in these transitions: the approach outlined in the Strategy is highly technological. Research and innovation should be linked to territories and people. There is convincing evidence emerging around the need for transdisciplinary research that brings together social and natural sciences with the practical and experiential knowledge of all stakeholders. The fundamental role of social-science research needs to be given a more prominent position. This is not an anti-technology or anti-innovation statement. All rural areas need to be connected to the internet in a proper and reliable way but it is important that digitalization remains a facilitator and not an end in itself. Food systems research and locally adapted, evidence-based technologies need to be fostered and all technologies need to be assessed in terms of sustainability and fairness.



Finally, for Professor Duncan it is important **how we govern food systems**: a clear democratic approach is not articulated. A multi-level governance approach that favours the guarantee of rights of the most vulnerable and the democratization of decision-making spaces is needed.

EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski

For the Commissioner, this is an important time to decide about the EU agricultural policy (F2F, CAP, GD, Biodiversity strategy, EU budgets). There is a need to discuss and share opinions about these policies.

The Commissioner stated that the Covid-19 crisis has severely tested the EU economy and agriculture. Yet farmers ensure food security and feed us even in times of crisis, therefore we must be grateful to them and guarantee financial security to them. The lesson is that we must pay closer attention to our food security.

According to the Commissioner, food imports will not guarantee food security – especially in times of crisis –, so it is important to rely more on EU farms. The EU is the world largest food exporter, but we now have new threats. Over the last decade, the EU has lost more than 4 million farms, especially small and family farms. We also face the risk of not having enough people willing to work the land.

Land concentration is taking place not only for production purposes and agriculture is being industrialised. This cannot be reconciled with EU environmental protection and sustainable development objectives. Land ownership is becoming concentrated, more than a half of the lands in the EU is in the hands of 3% of the owners, 80% of direct payments have been received by 20% of farmers, especially big farms. If we look at unprocessed food products, EU has an even bigger trade deficit: it imports more and more agricultural products so food security is threatened.

GD, F2F strategy, and biodiversity strategy are a challenge for EU agriculture but mark a real shift towards sustainable farming practices. They respect climate, environment, and animal welfare and provide the opportunity to explore the potential of small and medium family farms.

Agriculture based on small and medium family farming is not less efficient than intensive agriculture. These farms are also more crisis-resilient because less reliant on external supplies and markets and they are closer to local processing and markets. They make EU agriculture more environmentally friendly.

EU agriculture needs to be more sustainable but so do the policies addressed to farmers: stricter environmental requirements cannot be enforced but should be encouraged through financial incentives. A more ambitious proposal has been advanced by the EC for MFF for 2021-2027 (+ 26 billion euros).



In reaction to Ms Savigny, the Commissioner said that he fully agrees that we need less intensive animal production and we should increase local production. There is a chance to strengthen our small, less intensive, autonomous farms. But we have a problem in the EU in understanding what Food Sovereignty is but we can better understand what is a lack of Food Sovereignty (eg. industrial farms import the feed for their animals from non-EU countries).

The future of EU agriculture should not be based on imports, this is not the path to food security. Food security should be based on small and medium family farms. The GD, F2F, and Biodiversity strategies are a big opportunity in this sense. For the Commissioner we are going in a good direction to change our agriculture into more environmental, climate, animal friendly approach which is also more friendly for our farmers.

Round table of reactions on different topics that emerged from the questions from the attendees.

TRADE: in the light of the F2F, will the EU international trade framework and policy be renegotiated?

Genevieve Savigny: she explained that since the creation of WTO, trade has dominated the agricultural debate and dominated practice: we have to produce to sell outside the EU market. This has generated different issues: disappearance of small and medium farmers in EU, impact of EU imports on non-EU farmers. Competition is not good for farming; we need fairness at the global level. Food cannot be a commodity like the others. Trade should be fair for every farmer in the world. Ms Savigny claimed that the EU trade framework should be reviewed.

Commissioner Wojciechowski: according to the Commissioner, the F2F strategy is a fairly good strategy to reduce distances between “farm” and “fork” and make our agriculture less dependent on trade. However, he said that the idea is not to be against trade: there are still some sectors in EU agriculture that depend on exports (eg. wine and oil producers). However, we can do a lot to reduce the need for imports (e.g. soya beans from the US) and increase protein crop production for animals.

The link between farmers and local markets is very important and we need to strengthen it. We have high quality food in the EU, and this food should be targeting primarily EU consumers.

About renegotiating trade policy, the Commissioner claimed that trade agreements in the EU are mostly profitable for agriculture but there are some sectors which are negatively affected by the trade agreements and therefore should be protected. According to the Commissioner, it is very important to require the same EU production standards from importing countries; there should be equal competition. The F2F strategy and the biodiversity strategy oblige us to promote the high EU standards around the world.

Jagoda Munič: according to her, trade agreements and policies cannot contradict the implementation of the GD. We must promote EU standards (quality, fairness, but also



environmental conditionality). We must shorten supply chains, stabilize EU production, and guarantee a place for local production in the EU market. Competition between small and intensive farming is not only problematic in the global market but also in the EU internal market.

Jessica Duncan: according to her, EU trade narrative is not fit for the purpose of the F2F strategy. But in F2F, trade is an opportunity to improve agricultural sustainability globally. It is very important to address the impacts of the transition on non-EU farmers, since EU cannot improve its agriculture at the expenses of third countries (we need territorial solidarity).

ROLE OF CAP: is the CAP fitting the purpose of the F2F strategy? Do we need a new proposal?

Jagoda Munič: according to her, CAP should be redesigned to support small and medium farmers instead of industrial farms. There should also be a stronger link to the Biodiversity strategy. We should ensure not only higher quality of food but also lower environmental impact. There is still a huge debate going on about budget and money contributed by Member States and she hopes that Member States will contribute with their national budgets.

Jessica Duncan: according to her, eco-schemes provide the opportunity to refocus EU funds, away from direct income support.

Commissioner Wojciechowski: according to the Commissioner, with the GD we now have more environmental targets for farmers but less money to achieve them. Therefore, an increase in the CAP budget has been proposed, especially for Pillar II (on the 27th of May). However, the CAP budget should not be the only financial mechanism to address small and medium farmers, we should also consider the Recovery fund as an opportunity and investment to support them (rebuilding local processing industries in Europe). During the crisis, small farmers could not sell their products. We should include agriculture in the Recovery plan.

Also, rural development can be supported by the Cohesion fund (until now mainly rural development fund).

On fair prices for farmers: according to the Commissioner, we need sustainable policy for farmers and for the processing industries to support local production.

On the issue of transport: the Commissioner referred to “horrible EUROSTAT data” and pointed out that we transport a lot of food over long distances. This is very costly and affects prices, therefore he suggested that to achieve fair prices for farmers we need to limit transport needs.

Genevieve Savigny: she explained that initially the aim of the CAP was to feed EU citizens with food from Europe and there were market measures to ensure decent prices. However, EU self-sufficiency in the 80s started to cost money and other countries were protesting against EU protectionism. Instead of decreasing production to meet real consumption and



maintain fair prices, we increased production and lowered prices (decision of WTO in 1995) to compete in the global market. This has provoked the situation which we have now.

According to Ms Savigny, agriculture provides an opportunity to create energy from nature. Most farmers in the EU are small scale but they have been losing their jobs because CAP has empowered industrial farms (through direct payments). Beyond money, the priorities for small farmers are: adapting to local markets, being able to locally process their food, collective equipment to transform the food, lowering costs (eg. feeding cows with grass instead of imported feed may lead to small decrease in production but will be cheaper).

WORKERS AND PEASANTS' RIGHTS: is the F2F tackling the social issues related to agricultural workers and peasants' rights? & Democracy issue: which kind of governance are we going to have in the implementation of the F2F?

Genevieve Savigny: she explained that the UNDROP declaration is an important tool for ECVC. ECVC believe that in the F2F strategy and in the European GD the social issue is not strong enough. The F2F strategy mentions different social policies and ECVC is hoping that these will be more clearly defined.

Commissioner Wojciechowski: the Commissioner agreed that workers' rights is a very sensitive and important issue in EU agricultural policy and that social issues should be included in international strategy plans. He acknowledged that the GD is not so much focused on the issue of workers' rights but that social rights are part of EU policy and values. He claimed that the lack of respect for the rights of workers would be a reason to stop the EU subsidies and we should pay attention to this. The issue of seasonal workers is very sensitive especially in some EU agricultural sectors, as shown by the pandemic crisis. The EC has issued special recommendations for Member States to ensure that seasonal workers are treated as crucial workers and there is improvement in mobility across borders. The Commissioner also pointed at another issue: how to make EU agriculture less reliant on outside workers? The Commissioner said that less need for external workers means more resilience for agriculture. He said that we should support agrodiversity (different types of production) to make EU agriculture more resilient, specialization is sometimes creating the problem. According to statistics, more than 50% of agricultural workers in the EU come from outside the EU. The Commissioner concluded by saying that of course all workers should be treated according to EU standards and values.

Jessica Duncan: she explained that COVID19 has shed light on agricultural and seasonal workers (their precariousness). She suggested looking at labour across food systems since all workers are essential. Moreover, we should move beyond the economic discourse of labour shortages: the transition to a more sustainable system should be based on rights and social protection (she pointed at UNDROP as a basis). Ms Duncan claimed that food security cannot rely on low wages and agreed that both F2F and GD need a stronger focus on the social.



On governance: Professor Duncan claimed that we should draw inspiration from the rights-based approach and aim at policy integration (agriculture, health, education, infrastructure). The rights-based approach means giving a voice to the most vulnerable (different from multi-stakeholder approach). According to her, the Committee on food security offers an interesting model of participatory governance.

Jagoda Munič: she agreed that we should strengthen the social dimension of agricultural policy and that we have to focus on the rights-based approach. She explained that in Europe we lose farmers because they cannot compete with the industry, and then we have an industry that exploits migrant workers. These actors can produce cheap food and can compete with small-scale farmers. According to Ms Munič, if we want to compete fairly, we must help small-scale producers and cooperatives and ensure that industries respect workers' rights and environmental protection. This would enable a fair system for competition.

Are eco-schemes going far enough to respect the principles of F2F and comply with the true meaning of agroecology? Will they succeed in achieving the SDG and the climate goal without market regulation?

Commissioner Wojciechowski: the Commissioner argue that it is a very ambitious goal to have 25% of EU land covered by organic farming by 2030 (now 8%). He pointed out that the situation changes across Member States (e.g. Austria, where it is almost 25% against others where it is around 3%). He posed the question of which mechanisms should be adopted to motivate farmers to move to organic. According to the Commissioner, we will not achieve the target by forcing farmers to move to organic, but by encouraging them through financial means. And here comes the role of eco-schemes, which is a new idea in the EU agricultural policy. The Commissioner said that the current discussion is about eco-schemes being mandatory for Member States: currently they are obliged to propose eco-schemes but there is no list of potential eco-schemes. The Commissioner said that the attempt will be to have one. The Commissioner mentioned one particular eco-scheme linked to organic farming: agricultural land used as organic or converted into organic. According to him, it is particularly important to support this. The Commissioner said that the EC is discussing strengthening the agricultural policy through additional funds dedicated to the eco-schemes and that more instruments are needed to encourage farmers to implement this target. According to the Commissioner, the organic target will be a sign of failure or success in the future. The ambitious organic target is the result of the integration of the GD into the agricultural policy. The Commissioner also added that we now have an adequate budget for pillar II but we also need to strengthen pillar I.

Questions on technology: is the EU push for technology going to reduce the number of peasants? New technology in the milk sector brought it to indebtedness. GMOs: patents, property rights, and higher costs brought many problems to small farmers.



Commissioner Wojciechowski: the Commissioner declared that according to him intensive production reduces the need for workforce. But since organic farming requires more workforce, it provides a good opportunity to avoid depopulation of rural areas. About new technology and GMOs: the Commissioner revealed that when he was a member of the EP he was against the extension of GMOs in the EU, and that this is also his current position. The Commissioner argued that the responsibility is under DG Sante and Public Health, but that everything should be based on scientific evidence. The Commissioner concluded that EU agriculture should win in global competition not in the quantity but the quality of production.

At the end of the event each speaker gave her/his closing remarks. ECVC, the host, reminded everyone that the purpose of this engagement is to make sure the peasant voice is heard all the way through these policy discussions.