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## **Europe needs more farmers: Small-scale farmer perspective on the consequences of the war in Ukraine for European food sovereignty and the responsibilities of the European Union**

We are living in dramatic times: thousands of people are dying, millions are at risk, and hundreds of thousands are fleeing for refuge as a result of the war in Ukraine triggered by Russia's invasion. At this stage, Ukrainian farmers will probably not be able to plant this year. The war is causing food and energy problems across Europe. This situation requires extraordinary measures to feed populations, but also a major effort to rebuild Europe's food sovereignty.

### **The Farm to Fork Strategy is the tool to increase autonomy.**

Last week, we read comments from the Commissioner for Agriculture and the French Minister of Agriculture questioning the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F), considering the need to "correct" them to tackle the problem of food security.

From the point of view of Fergal Anderson, member of ECVC and the Irish organisation Talamh Beo: "We want to clearly underline that abandoning the F2F Strategy would not contribute to solving the enormous challenges facing European agriculture. On the contrary, the war in Ukraine shows that our dependence on synthetic fertilisers produced from Russian gas is a major fragility for our food sovereignty. Similarly, livestock farming is massively dependent on imports of cereals and oilseeds."

"Faced with the fragilities revealed by the current crisis, it is more necessary than ever to support an agricultural model based on the mixed, complementary livestock farming and crop production, which is the only way to guarantee soil fertility in the long term. We advocate public policies and market regulation to support the transition towards more autonomous and resilient agroecological models."

ECVC reaffirms its support for the objectives of the F2F. We continue to demand that this strategy is equipped with the necessary public policy instruments to facilitate the necessary transition towards more resilient agricultural and livestock models that are less dependent on imported inputs.

### **Behind the geopolitical crisis, there are climate, biodiversity and land crises**

The F2F Strategy was adopted in response to the very high risks that climate change and the biodiversity crisis pose to European food production. Unfortunately, the environmental catastrophe did not disappear with the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

The alarming conclusions of the IPCC's sixth assessment report<sup>1</sup>, published last week, show the dangers of abandoning the Green Deal goals, i.e., reducing the use of pesticides, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the use of antibiotics in livestock farming.

Over the last two years, the strategy has emphasised the importance of protecting ecologically valuable areas designed to protect watercourses, wetlands, etc. It would be a mistake to forget all these ecological priorities in the name of unbridled production.

Attila Szocs, a Romanian member of the ECVC Coordinating Committee recalls: "As a short-term measure, we consider it essential to better protect and share agricultural land. This is why we are working on a European directive on agricultural land which aims to put an end to the artificialisation of agricultural land, to promote access to land for young people so that they can set up as farmers and to prohibit land grabbing by speculators. "

**European farmers guarantee food sovereignty and a healthy environment, not industrial agriculture.**

It is Europe's ten million small- and medium-scale farmers who guarantee Europe's food sovereignty and food security. They are at the forefront.

As Vitor Rodrigues, Portuguese member of the ECVC Coordinating Committee says: "Opponents of the F2F strategy are now trying to use the tragic situation in Ukraine to maintain the status quo in favour of industrial agriculture. However, this industrial model does not feed the European population. Much of it goes to agrofuels, to industrial processing or to be exported at low prices, to the detriment of farmers in third countries. The so-called competitiveness of industrial agriculture exists at the detriment of the environment and the incomes of farmers and farm workers. Large industry actors accumulate public subsidies and sell out to the highest bidder. In this crisis, it is urgent to prioritise food production over non-food agricultural production, and to serve the domestic market without harming third country farmers. "

**We must move away from the free trade dogma that has destroyed our food sovereignty and our environment.**

ECVC proposes profound changes in Europe's agricultural and food policy and seeks commitment from the institutions to achieve this.

ECVC demands that market regulation measures be strengthened so that the prices paid to farmers actually cover the costs of production and allow for a decent income for all workers on the land. We demand financial support for a transition to agroecological and farmer-based systems in all regions of Europe.

Morgan Ody, a farmer from Brittany and Member of the Coordinating Committee of ECVC and global coordinator of La Via Campesina underlines: "Strong public regulation of agricultural markets and prices is now needed to help the millions of small- and medium-scale

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1 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>

farmers to produce. The peasant agroecological model is the option that provides the most sustainable response to this crisis "

In addition, we must ensure that there is no speculation in foodstuffs and protect consumers and farmers who rely on being able to buy the raw materials needed for animal feed..Speculation in the financial markets of food and agricultural products must be prohibited.

ECVC advocates the creation of strategic food reserves in each EU country, with coordination at European level. An attitude of *laissez-faire* in agriculture and food security is no longer an option.

At last, there must be profound changes in European trade policy. WTO agreements and free trade agreements put in danger sovereignty and food security in Europe: they must be broken.

**ECVC expresses the commitment of the millions of small- and medium-scale farmers in Europe to tackle this extraordinary situation and produce the food we need while moving towards true food sovereignty. The challenges of climate and biodiversity must not be left aside, in order to ensure the sustainable production of food. We reaffirm our support for the objectives of the F2F Strategy, and the need to equip the strategy with public policies to achieve them.**

**Food sovereignty, now! More peasants for better food**