



EUROPEAN COORDINATION VIA CAMPESINA (ECVC) RESPONSE FOR THE CONSULTATION ON THE EU LONG-TERM VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12525-Long-term-vision-for-rural-areas>

For European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), the current situation in rural areas of the European Union is particularly worrying due to the economic models that have been promoted and installed in these areas.

The agricultural sector, which is the most important sector in rural areas, is being restructured because of unfair agricultural, energy and food policies that benefit large industrial farms and favour export-oriented agriculture. This system thus pushes small farmers into bankruptcy, often migrating to urban areas. In the period 2000-2012, 4.8 million full-time jobs were lost in EU agriculture. Europe lost one third of its small farms between 2003 (12 million farms) and 2013 (8 million farms). At the same time, large farms own more and more land. Around 20% of EU farms receive 80% of EU farm subsidies, making the CAP illegitimate for small farmers and citizens as a whole. In addition, the CAP is increasingly criticised for its impact on the climate, as while industrial agriculture is strongly supported, small-scale and agro-ecological farming is often marginalised. Finally, the lack of sufficient market and price regulation mechanisms has led the agricultural sector to destroy employment and leave the labour force in hardship and particularly vulnerable.

Therefore, for the ECVC, building a new vision for rural areas should start precisely with a radical change in the vision of agricultural and trade policy within the EU institutions and the Member States.

The European institutions often propose technology and technical innovation as solutions to these problems, thus hiding the fact that these problems are mainly due to the political decision to treat the agricultural sector as a commercial sector like any other. Moreover, this choice is mainly driven by the profit motive of transnational and commercial groups.

With the depopulation of rural areas, the increasing impact of climate change and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, EU policy makers should take the opportunity to look again at the agricultural sector, based on some key aspects:

Revitalising rural areas and renewing generations

Depopulation and the resulting ageing of the population in rural areas must be halted by creating agricultural and non-agricultural jobs and increasing the supply of public services, particularly in the transport, health and education/training sectors.

Creating long-term sustainable agricultural models for the resilience of our food systems

There is a need to develop peasant agriculture in order to increase the number of small and medium sized farms in rural areas and thus stop the phenomenon of industrial farm expansions. In the next ten years, half of current farmers will retire. Without adequate facilities, rural areas will empty out and industrialization will continue its destructive work upon the autonomy, remuneration of farmers and on the planet.

The resilience of our agricultural and food systems must be supported by stopping liberal policies and preventing specialisation in agricultural sectors that are subject to the law of international markets and dependent on exports.

We must develop the autonomy of farms, for example by producing quality feed for on-farm livestock, in order to meet the current environmental, economic and social challenges.

Farmers must have control over the entire production chain and obtain remunerative prices for agricultural products. Agricultural commodity prices should not be dependent on world prices.

There is a need to relocate agricultural production to achieve greater food sovereignty, develop on-farm processing and develop local markets and close proximity circuits. The number of processing infrastructures, such as local slaughterhouses, has been considerably reduced, and local supply chains have been abandoned as a result. Adding value to local products can give life to more isolated rural areas, such as mountainous areas, with small structures and better contact with consumers. Advancing the public purchase of local or agro-ecological food can be a step forward for rural development.

Regulating markets, rebalancing the value chain for the benefit of farmers and curbing unbridled competition are urgent measures to ensure a decent income. From tomorrow, food and agriculture must once again become one of the cornerstones and foundations of societies.

Access to farmers' seeds must be given and all attempts at deregulation of GMOs, including new genomic techniques, must be stopped through the strict application of existing European legislation on GMOs and the prohibition of patents on plants and animals. These patents are in flagrant contradiction with the rights of peasants and rice farmers as defined in Article 9 of the [International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture \(ITPGRFA\)](#) and Article 19 of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other Rural Workers \(UNDROP\)](#).

The issue of access to land must be resolved. Ensure fair access to land for small farmers, peasants and agro-ecology, through the elaboration and implementation of an EU land directive implementing the CFS guidelines on land tenure at European level, and put an end to all forms of land speculation at European level.

We must innovate to improve work in the field and respect the territories: it will not be a question of excessive digitalisation, but rather of calibrating it to the specific needs of each territory and of peasant production.

CAP - second pillar of rural development

The CAP budget for the second pillar must be consistent with a vision of vibrant, prosperous and sustainable rural areas. The proposed budget cuts in the 2 pillars for the post 2020 CAP are particularly negative and will cause serious problems especially in Rural Development policy.

Support for young people and new arrivals, for disadvantaged territories such as mountain areas, for the agro-ecological transition and for agri-environmental and climate measures (DFAIT) must be strengthened if Europe is to achieve the objectives set out in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, within the framework of the Green Deal. The target of at least 25% of agricultural land being devoted to organic farming by 2030 must be supported and accompanied by measures aimed at long-term and changeable agricultural models, in an agro-ecological and self-sufficient farming perspective. To this end, support from the second pillar for rural development is vital to support a long-term, multiannual and sustainable transition.

Respecting the rights of people living in rural areas

The resilience and development of rural areas cannot be based solely on the economic but also on the social aspect. Agricultural and rural development policies must ensure adequate wages and working conditions for rural workers, protecting them from abuse and dismissal, with specific and appropriate measures for seasonal workers, as well as for displaced migrants with paper problems or precarious residence status.

Farmers and those living in rural areas must be involved in policy decisions, improving governance in rural areas through greater consultation with the rural population.

Changing European trade policy

A new vision for rural areas should include a new trade policy for agricultural products, including the renegotiation of WTO rules and the exclusion of trade agreements that do not respect farmers' rights. Agricultural trade must be rethought in the context of a social and environmental relocation of agricultural production, without which the sustainable relocation of production will not be possible.

Changing competition policy

Mechanisms must be put in place to protect farmers' incomes through competition policy. Agriculture should be confirmed as an exception in this area and we must avoid distortions of competition by importing agricultural products at prices that are lethal to producers' incomes. There is a need to strengthen their position in the food supply chain and to develop genuine producer organisations for supply management.

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