



Open letter – Amplify the local voices and address rural development in the CAP post 2020

The Rural Coalition and the Coalition of European Agriregions, representatives of rural local actors - farmers, forest owners, rural value chain actors, landowners, hunters and regional authorities - call for the EU to support the diversity of its rural areas. This will require setting up an ambitious strategy for the development of rural areas in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020, providing an adequate budget in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and not leaving rural communities behind in the European Green Deal.

European rural areas are severely threatened by rural exodus and the growing urban-rural divide. Almost three quarters of the European population lived in urban areas in 2015 and this could rise to just over 80 % by 2050¹, while the number of farmers is steadily decreasing. Between 2005 and 2016, the labour force in agriculture decreased by 9.5 million people, almost a third of the sector's total labour force².

As representatives of rural communities, we are greatly concerned by this downward trend, that is currently absent from most public debates. Future EU policies need to consider the voices of rural communities in building a more sustainable and circular future, to which these communities contribute already. Thus, European rural areas require clear policy perspectives in order to develop bottom-up and community-led interventions tailored to local needs through decentralised management and implementation at regional level.

Involving rural actors in policy-making processes is key, particularly in the framework of the future CAP, but also in the European Green Deal, which includes the Farm to Fork Strategy and EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, and the long-term vision for rural areas. Without ambitious strategies and adequate financial means, the threat of rural exodus will lower aspirations and impact the success of the EU's major policies.

Providing adequate public support

For rural areas to remain viable and attractive places to live, work in and visit, it is crucial that public support is maintained at least at the same level as in the current programming period (2014-2020). CAP has been an effective tool so far to limit the growing divide between urban and rural areas. Therefore, strong funding for rural development and the CAP is fundamental.

Moreover, synergies with other EU funds must be further improved. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) should be invested in and facilitate appropriate infrastructure, support the delivery of basic services and tackle the urban-rural divide.

Boosting growth and employment

To better target individuals' needs and facilitate entrepreneurship, training, advisory services and knowledge transfer, with a sharp focus on the younger generations and rural labour force, life-long learning and the role of women must be improved.

Advisory services and CAP networks, including the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS), have the potential to help rural actors with the uptake of innovation and new technologies. Investing in these tools is key to enabling competitiveness and sustainability.

¹ https://www.bbvaresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/European-urbanization-trends_.pdf

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Farmers_and_the_agricultural_labour_force_-_statistics#Fewer_farms.2C_fewer_farmers

Encouraging efforts for sustainability

Rural stakeholders play a central role in the sustainable and active management of the areas they work and live in. They should therefore have the possibility to be compensated and supported in their provision of ecosystem services, such as climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation.

Carbon storage, sequestration and substitution should be further investigated and promoted, while specific measures for Areas of Natural Constraints (ANCs) should be maintained in their ability to prevent land abandonment and promote biodiversity, particularly on high nature value farmland.

Moreover, the circular bio-economy offers unique opportunities to support new business models targeted at resource efficiency, and empowering rural areas and their value chains as leaders of the conversion and revalorisation of resources.

Building resilience

Rural areas have great potential in generating added value for society and meeting society's demands. The increasing frequency of risks in the agriculture and forestry sectors impact the economic sustainability of rural areas and the likelihood of people choosing to move to or remain in them. It is therefore of primary importance to improve access to risk management tools.

For rural areas to tackle the demographic challenge and be viable in the long run, a sharp focus on generational renewal must be adopted. Young farmers and entrants must be given improved tools and enabled in their access to land, credit and training.

As representatives of rural actors and regional authorities, the Rural Coalition and the Coalition of European Agriregions want to re-emphasise the central role of European policies in meeting the expectations of farmers, forest owners, rural value chain actors, landowners, hunters and regional authorities, as well as citizens and consumers, and in contributing to the economic development and dynamism of rural areas.

Yours sincerely,



Olivier Allain
Vice-president of Brittany
Region in charge of
Agriculture and Agriregion
Coordinator



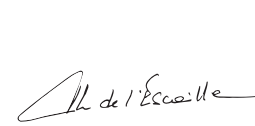
George Aman
CIC President



Fanny-Pomme Langue
CEPF Secretary General



Jannes Maes
President of CEJA



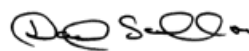
Thierry de l'Escaille
Secretary General
of ELO



Karsten Maier
Secretary General
of UECBV



Pekka Pesonen
Secretary General
of Copa-Cogeca



David Scallan
Secretary General
of FACE



Juan Andres Gutierrez Lazpita
President of Euromontana



Governo dos Açores

AUTONOME PROVINZ
BOZEN - SÜDTIROL



PROVINCIA AUTONOMA
DI BOLZANO - ALTO ADIGE



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