



Re: Open Letter to French Minister Le Foll

Brussels, 31st August 2016

Dear Minister Le Foll,

You have invited European agriculture ministers to Chambord on 2 September for an exchange of views on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and on the main issues currently affecting the agriculture sector across 27 EU Member States.

France Nature Environnement (FNE) and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) welcome this initiative.

The various environmental, social, and economic crises affecting the agriculture sector are alarming and call into question the legitimacy of the CAP. Various recent studies¹ have concluded that the CAP will not meet its own initial objectives, in particular the sustainable management of natural resources.

Resources such as biodiversity, water and soil, on which agricultural activity depends so heavily, are in constant decline. In France, numbers of farmland birds have fallen by 32% in 25 years, and butterfly numbers have halved². At the same time, pesticide use continues to increase. The cost of cleaning up pollution from agriculture in France is between €0.9 billion-€2.9 billion a year. Health problems linked to intensive agriculture (air and water pollution) are also on the rise and it is farmers themselves who are the most affected.

The industrialisation of farming and the race to the bottom when it comes to prices have brought farming in Europe to a crucial crossroads. Our current system is completely at odds with the values of a sustainable farming model, in particular agro-ecological methods. Although the current CAP is supposed to be 'greener' than ever, farmers can still use pesticides on areas of land set aside for nature protection and grow maize monocultures under the guise of 'crop rotation'. Funding for agro-environment measures and organic farming under the current CAP is highly insufficient.

Instead of promoting a more resilient and less polluting agricultural model which is less dependent on chemical inputs, the CAP further entrenches the most harmful aspects of our broken farming model.

Climate change subsequently intensifies the difficult position in which European agriculture finds itself today: production systems need to be adapted to deal with this challenge and should also be changed to effectively reduce emissions. In addition, Europe's unsteady political context is being challenged as the future of its union between the 28 member states is called into question.

¹ <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm?LinkServID=0DFEF8B2-5056-B741-DB05EBEF517EDCCB> ;
<http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm?LinkServID=C27A139B-5056-B741-DBE569DF1728BF14> ;
<http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm?LinkServID=0E2EEC07-5056-B741-DBA777455AA46334>

² <https://www.fne.asso.fr/publications/politique-agricole-commune-pac-fne-livre-son-analyse>



For France Nature Environnement and the European Environmental Bureau, the current greening plan is not acceptable. While the European Union's expenditure with regards to the CAP equate to over €53 billion a year, the European Environment Agency underlines that agriculture is directly affecting rural biodiversity and polluting 40% of rivers. If the CAP cannot contribute to solving these major issues, the questioning of its legitimacy is justified. The European taxpayer should not have to finance both agriculture and decontamination/depollution generated by systems focused on over-production.

The post-2020 CAP should be one which reconnects and reconciles agriculture, the environment and food. Tomorrow's CAP should be a new contract between farmers and society that helps them transit towards more sustainable practices rather than locking them into a cycle of vicious industrialisation. It is not a matter of spending more, but rather one of spending better, to transform the CAP into a public policy from which not only Europe's farmers can benefit but all of its citizens as well.

Environmental NGOs previously solicited a strong budget for the CAP on the condition that it would allow a more sustainable management of natural resources. In the end, a final budget was effectively secured, but the greening of the CAP has been reduced to an empty shell.

We will only support the upcoming budget once its content is clearly defined and we see that it is coherent with common EU objectives regarding the environment health and food. The CAP should be one of the principal channels to reform the European Union and to include its citizens in an ambitious and well-funded project. This means a critical review of the policy and a detailed evaluation of its objectives, its consistency or lack thereof with other policies (environmental, health, development policies) and the reason for its existence. The review must be inclusive and must be conducted as soon as possible within the framework of a complete audit (fitness check) requested by over 100 NGOs in a letter to the President of the European Commission.

We are looking forward to the meeting on 2 September, and have high hopes of finding a fresh dynamic for the preparation of a new CAP.

Yours sincerely,

Denez L'HOSTIS

Président de France Nature Environnement

Jeremy Wates,

Secretary General, EEB