

TO:

Commissioner Phil Hogan,
Member of the European Commission,
Agriculture and Rural development
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RE: Cork 2.0: European Conference on Rural Development, 5-6 September

Brussels, 2nd September 2016

Dear Commissioner,

In advance of the upcoming Cork conference on rural development, we would like to take the opportunity to provide some 'sustainable food for thought' ahead of what will hopefully be a productive debate about the future of European farming.

The first Cork declaration ('A living country side', November 1996) was to inaugurate a new initiative to revitalize rural economies. Over the years, the Rural Development fund has shown European policy working at its best, supporting small scale producers, establishing short supply chains to bring producers closer to consumers, not to mention the Agri-Environment schemes which can boast preventing a number of species from disappearing from some countries. However, it is clear that this has been far from enough. Since the first Cork declaration, the number of farmers in Europe has halved. Our natural resources, such as biodiversity, have dwindled at an equally disconcerting rate. It is largely because the positive efforts of the rural development funds are nullified by the considerably more influential and harmful pillar I.

Considering that over a third of the European budget is devoted to supporting farming, one would expect our farming industry to be in good shape. This is however not the case and 2016 has had its fair share of 'crises'. With the crash in milk price, Russian export ban on pig meat, and now a potentially disastrous wheat crop in Western Europe after an unseasonably wet spring, it now feels as if our farming sector moves from one crisis to another. To complete the picture we are facing a major environmental crisis and an unsteady political context in Europe. In addition, the CAP is often pushing farmers into precarious positions. By locking them into patterns of intensification, overproduction, resource degradation and specialization, the policy is making farmers ever more vulnerable to price fluctuations and unpredictable weather.

Although the new CAP was supposed to be 'greener' than ever, several analyses, including ours¹, have begun to illustrate the emptiness of the new greening measures in the policy: farmers can use pesticides on areas of land set aside for nature protection and grow maize monocultures under the guise of 'crop rotation', to mention a couple of examples. Additionally, funding for agri-environmental measures has decreased in comparison with the previous period. For us the conclusion is clear: the CAP will fail to ensure sustainable management of natural resources. This is why we have called for an objective 'root and branch' appraisal of the CAP in the form of a Fitness Check. During the last reform, environmental

¹ Uncap the Truth, spotlight on EU farming policy: <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm/library/uncap-the-truth-spotlight-on-eu-farm-policy/>

The hidden truth (Rural Development) <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm/news-events/news/new-rural-development-plans-and-the-environment-the-hidden-truth/>

Uncap the truth briefing <http://www.eeb.org/index.cfm/library/policy-briefing-uncap-the-truth/>

NGOs supported a strong budget for the CAP on the condition that it would allow a more sustainable management of natural resources. In the end, a substantial budget was effectively secured, but the greening of the CAP was largely annihilated. The environmental NGO community will certainly take a different approach next time round; we will not support the allocation of a substantial part of the upcoming budget to CAP until its content is clearly defined and we see that the CAP is made coherent with common EU objectives regarding the environment, health and food. For this the debate must move beyond questions like which measures work and where funding should be targeted. It should start with asking the fundamental questions and developing answers based on rigorous analysis and evidence. This is why together with some 100 NGOs we have called for a fitness check of the CAP – a call which has been echoed by scientists, MEPs and recently a senior adviser of the President of the Commission himself.

The first CAP was established to ensure that this continent had enough food after World War II. The 21st century has come with many new challenges: the issues of major biodiversity loss, the carbon footprint of our food causing climate change, monumental levels of food waste and populations increasingly plagued with diet-related health issues are the problems that a new policy should tackle. The CAP of tomorrow **should be one which reconnects and reconciles agriculture, people, the environment and food and the only way to get there is to start with a full, honest and inclusive assessment of the current policy and its failures, hence a fitness check.**

We cannot afford another broken CAP and we hope that your conference and the declaration will be the start of an inclusive process that will eventually lead us to sustainable food and farming.

Yours sincerely,




Angelo Caserta, Regional Director- BirdLife Europe




Ágnes Zolyomi, Secretary General, CEEweb for Biodiversity




Jeremy Wates, Secretary General, EEB