



To: Agriculture Ministers of EU Member States

Cc: Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal and Commissioners for Agriculture and for Environment, and the Chairs of the European Parliament Agriculture and Environment Committees

Re: Input to the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council Meeting, Brussels, 26 February 2024

Brussels, 22nd February 2024

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the European Environmental Bureau, I am writing to share our views on some of the issues on the agenda of the forthcoming EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 26th February 2024. We have structured the letter according to the provisional agenda that is publicly available, mainly focusing on your deliberations within our expertise and priorities.

I invite you to take our concerns into account during the final official level preparations, as well as at the meeting itself.

The need for a structural response to the current state of crisis in the agricultural sector

While the current farmer protests taking place across Europe represent a breaking point, they are the result of policies that for years, have supported an untenable system for most farmers. The majority of farmers are among the first victims of this reality where progressive intensification aimed at ever-increasing production and continuous lowering of prices at farm gate has rendered many unable to compete and forced many out of business. Conflicting policy measures and incentives that on the one hand support (at least on paper) agri environmental practices and on the other hand foster intensification and unsustainable practices notably through untargeted approaches, are cause for severe frustration in the farming community.

Continuous years of droughts and floods are increasingly severe and are becoming a tangible threat to farming. Biodiversity loss continues to accelerate, with 70-80% of insects having declined in the last decades primarily due to pesticides and intensive farming practices. Our soils keep depleting with 60-70% of soils in Europe considered to be in a degraded state. This sobering picture represents a threat to food security if practices do not evolve. What is urgently needed is a systemic reform of the EU's agri-food system through the adaptation of the policies that regulate it by repurposing its budget, instruments and administrative system towards the overarching objective of supporting a just transition towards social and environmental sustainability. This objective is overarching and should encompass the key areas of long-term food security, environmental sustainability, thriving rural livelihoods, resilient supply chains and healthy and sustainable diets.

It is vital that the political actors interested in short-term political gains over addressing crucial structural change are not allowed to continue co-opting farmers' discontent feeding into the false polarisation between environmental and agricultural interests. Not only is this dangerous but the

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recent announcements from the European Commission to allow for a new derogation on CAP GAEC 8, the withdrawal of the Sustainable use of Plant Protection Products legislative proposal and more recently the decision to put the Water Resilience Initiative on hold are threatening our chances of achieving social and environmental sustainability in the farming sector. We therefore condemn these [ad hoc and short-sighted responses](#) to what is a systemic crisis of our food system in its entirety, requiring system-based transformation to safeguard our capacity to provide food and public goods in the mid to long term. Much as there is no food without farmers, there are no farmers without nature.

Instead, we need to build a strong consensus among stakeholders, so that progress on shaping a meaningful transition to sustainable agri-food systems can proceed with the needed support and contribution of all relevant actors.

For this to be achieved, the EU Commission and other public authorities must ensure the relevant public discourse and political processes are rooted in evidence-based principles. It must also recognise that **a successful transition cannot occur without ensuring the well-being and livelihoods of all farmers, identifying the relevant actors, policies and processes in the food system that undermine this. For example, the disproportionate power of middle chain actors and unfair trading practices. Lastly, acceptance that without tackling unsustainable consumption, the transition to environmental sustainability is inescapable if we are to secure long-term food security for current and future generations.**

Yours sincerely,



Patrick ten Brink,

Secretary General of the European Environmental Bureau

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