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**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – The Future of the Common Agricultural Policy
(own-initiative opinion)**

(C/2024/5363)

Rapporteurs: Isilda GOMES (PT/PES), Mayor of Portimão
Piotr CAŁBECKI (PL/EPP), President of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

Objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2027

1. points out that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which, according to the TFEU, aims at guaranteeing the functioning and development of the internal market for agricultural products, is also a partnership between society and agriculture to ensure a sufficient and stable supply of quality food, and to guarantee decent incomes for farmers, maintaining a sufficient agricultural labour force across the EU, protecting the environment, combating climate change and keeping up the dynamic development of rural areas. Acknowledges that these goals are interconnected, and one cannot be achieved in isolation, and that it is necessary to simplify the methodology to attain these goals;
2. endorses that agricultural biodiversity aligns with the CAP's objective of environmental protection and climate change mitigation. Agricultural biodiversity, encompassing the variety of plant and animal species within farming ecosystems, contributes to resilience against pests, diseases, and climate extremes, further reinforcing the interconnected goals of the CAP; affirms that resilience in agriculture pertains to the system's ability to adapt and recover in the face of challenges, such as climate variability or market fluctuations, with those affirmations having particular significance in island regions;
3. considers that food production and management, especially in island regions, will become increasingly important and strategic in the coming years in both economic terms (turnover value) social terms (impact on the quality of life of EU residents), environmental terms (sustainability and ecological impact) and in light of the changed geopolitical context;
4. in this regard, the new CAP should be designed, based on the best available knowledge and scientific evidence and on fundamental principles relating to the preservation and innovation of the agricultural and agri-food production structure in Europe, regional particularities, the development of identity-based food products and traditions that are also improved through advanced technology geared towards productivity and sustainability;
5. points out that farms must be able to reconcile production aspects with environmental, economic and social aspects, which are the three prongs of sustainability. In this regard, even if larger farms can also deliver a valuable contribution to food security, the role of micro, small and medium-sized farms, which are often family farms and produce on a small or medium scale, best represents the traditional European model of agriculture, including the highly specific agriculture of the outermost regions, while being inextricably linked to the development of rural areas, should not be overlooked and their participation in the CAP should be simplified, for instance through an exemption from compliance with some measures;
6. stresses the importance of the POSEI programme for the outermost regions in guaranteeing the supply of essential agricultural products for human consumption, securing the development of the livestock and crop diversification sectors, and maintaining and strengthening the competitiveness of traditional agricultural activities. Calls, therefore, for the programme to be strengthened through an increase in its budget allocation;

7. points out that the CAP must recognise, give visibility to and highlight the worth of extensive livestock farming in mountain areas with native breeds in land planning and management, pointing to its contribution to maintaining and preserving high nature value systems, fire prevention and biodiversity by compensating for it, paying particular attention to the damage resulting from its coexistence with wildlife;

8. feels strongly that the current discussion requires dialogue and trust, and so the European Commission should listen to farmers who deserve fair income that is in line with the agricultural and climate conditions of their regions, but should also take into account consumer demands for healthy products and citizens' demand to improve animal welfare, protect the environment and combat climate change; Rural policy, and the problem of depopulation and desertification, must also be addressed in order to avoid an increase in dissatisfaction with the European project;

9. over its 60 years, the CAP has significantly contributed to the cohesion of rural areas, ensuring the viability and sustainability of agricultural activities across the European Union. The CAP's support instruments must address the unique challenges of regions with specific geographical constraints such as islands and mountain regions;

10. points out that the current CAP has benefited from the insertion, for the first time since its establishment in 1962, of a European mechanism to enforce compliance with the rules in force on the rights of workers in the agricultural sector, without creating any additional administrative burden. Thus calls on the Commission to assess before the end of 2026 the impact of this social dimension to the CAP and to propose ways to improve its efficiency through other policies and funds, including measures to enhance conditions for farm workers;

11. notes that the existing CAP has failed to meet many of its goals and has been disrupted by critical events such as the war in Ukraine and its implications for declining profitability in agriculture, market instability, the increase in production costs, including energy costs, the different and rapidly changing agricultural and climate conditions in the regions, and has failed to respond adequately to the unmet expectations of farmers whose average income level remains below the average level of the economic sectors, rural inhabitants and consumers;

12. notes the challenge that the current CAP is not fully consistent with the objectives of the EU Action Plan for Organic Farming, the Green Deal and the EU's Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies and cannot sufficiently reward farmers who make an extra effort to implement the green transition on their farm, for example by using their land for organic farming. In that respect, considers that farms certified as organic should be exempted from eco-schemes and be paid because of the very nature of their operations;

13. emphasises that the CAP 2027+ should abide by the following objectives:

- (a) Build a resilient and sustainable food system which delivers food security and nutrition for all. Food security should be based on food produced in Europe that is economically, environmentally and socially appropriate to consumers' place of residence, including in island regions;
- (b) Safeguard the economic, social, and environmental foundations to generate long-term food security and nutrition, also for future generations;
- (c) Ensure a sufficient and stable supply of high-quality food and stability in food product markets;
- (d) Guarantee fair economic returns to all stakeholders involved in food production, processing, distribution and consumption, guaranteeing an adequate distribution of value throughout the chain in particular for primary producers and thus a fair standard of living for those working in agriculture;
- (e) Food for EU consumers must have high health benefits and be produced ethically while ensuring that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices. The same should be required for products imported from third countries;
- (f) Food production must take into account environmental requirements and enhance the biological properties of resources available to agriculture (soil, landscape, water, air, fallow land, meadows, biological enclaves), strive to restore closed-loop production cycles, and enrich the biological resources for renewable energy and the same should be required for products imported from third countries;

- (g) Food production should target a maximum of output and quality at the lowest input of resources, promoting sustainable technical progress, lowest environmental pressure and lowest supply chain footprint possible, which can be achieved by a variety of local and regional food production systems depending on circumstances, including organic farming systems and controlled environment agriculture systems;
- (h) The EU's agricultural policy must take into account the sustainability of natural resources and protect biodiversity and animal habitats;
- (i) The CAP should foster generational renewal and encourage individuals who are new to the sector to enter agriculture in order to give a sustainable and innovative future to the agricultural system;
- (j) EU agricultural policy must promote innovation and knowledge transfer in all areas in order to provide the agricultural production system with the appropriate tools to face new production and environmental challenges;
- (k) Farmers must be supported in mitigating and adapting to the risks arising from climate change, including through increased investments in infrastructure;
- (l) The CAP must help make rural areas strong, attractive and resilient. This includes safeguarding services of general interest, future-proof technical and social infrastructure and adequate local services. Rural areas should guarantee a high quality of life. Preserving local and regional identity and cultural as well as natural heritage is key to this;
- (m) Food waste must be reduced throughout the value chain – from field to retail. EU residents should also be conscious and responsible consumers striving to drastically reduce food waste and to make sustainable purchasing choices;
- (n) The CAP must tailor its actions to the diversity of European agriculture and livestock farms;
- (o) The CAP should promote the development of a model of agricultural production that is traditional, family-based, locally rooted and environmentally friendly, in which small and medium-sized farms are given priority by providing them with resources in all areas to enable them to overcome the many challenges they face;
- (p) The CAP should combat the abandonment and under-use of agricultural land, providing sufficient areas of land for those farms that require them, anticipating forest fires and population recovery in rural areas;

14. in the context of the same objectives, the CAP 2027+ should continue to give special treatment to agriculture and rural development in the outermost regions in compliance with Article 349 TFEU. In general, this means adapting the CAP to the constraints of these regions, including maintaining the Programme of Options Specifically Relating to Remoteness and Insularity (POSEI) scheme, and in particular increasing budgetary allocations under the EAFRD and the EAGF, not only in order to address the challenges these regions face in the context of their increasing vulnerability to the effects of climate change and international crises, but also to increase the resilience of the agricultural sector and increase food security;

15. points out that preventing crises is more effective and less costly than reacting after a crisis, when entire sectors of the agricultural economy must be supported with significant budgetary resources. Therefore, strongly supports market regulation mechanisms such as public stocks, supply control mechanisms, reduction of the production or quotas in order to avoid speculation, crises and strong fluctuation of agricultural prices (1);

Ensuring food security and market stability

16. emphasises the critical importance of prioritising long term food security within the CAP 2027+. Food security can only be ensured by farmers whether working in agri- and/or horticulture and must be defined in terms of quantity, quality and the economy, with a primary focus on ensuring that EU citizens have access to safe and ample food supplies at reasonable prices while safeguarding production capacity and consumer markets;

(1) Past experiences, like subsidies to reduce milk production tested in 2016 or supply control mechanisms managed directly by economic players, such as in viticulture or for appellation of cheeses, demonstrate the effectiveness of these approaches.

17. recognises the strategic importance of sustainable food production given climate change and geopolitical instability. Autonomy with regard to food security and production must therefore be a strategic goal for the EU in its future policies. In that regard, it is necessary to recognise the particular dependence and vulnerability of certain regions with specific geographical constraints, such as outermost regions or the EU's island regions, in view of the above-mentioned objective of food security. That means that strategies and measures to ensure food security must be defined more specifically for those regions. In this context, asks the European Commission to set up a European Water Strategy with a strong agricultural dimension, as water resources are the foundation of agricultural production and therefore of food security;

18. regrets that the European Commission did not put forward the sustainable food systems proposal in the current mandate. In this regard, calls for any future climate-, agricultural-, or food-related proposals to not promote lab-grown products to safeguard the cultural heritage of the Member States and protect traditionally prepared food;

19. considers that it is unacceptable that the EU become even more dependent on external suppliers in terms of acquiring or producing food. Points out that this would lead to excessive risk of political or economic blackmail, blockades preventing physical access, excessive price fluctuations and socio-economic destabilisation;

20. believes that food security comprises sufficient quantity and quality of healthy food, as well as affordability for consumers and price stability, as laid down in EU agricultural legislation. Moreover, consumers must be made aware of the importance of a balanced diet and the farm-to-table concept, minimising the negative environmental impact during production, processing, transportation and storage;

21. believes it is essential that the future CAP be capable of supporting farmers towards increasingly competitive and sustainable production systems by re-establishing the link with rural areas and promoting their development; welcomes the recent adoption of a single European text on quality production (Regulation on geographical indications) that ensures better alignment between all sectors while safeguarding the specificities of the various branches;

22. points out that the main tool for implementing the CAP should be the protection and regulation of the EU's common agricultural and food market. This should entail the application of new fair principles of importing and exporting agricultural and food products that do not create extra bureaucracy for our farmers, but create a level-playing field, like the implementation of 'mirror clauses' in current and future European trade agreements and a new international trade framework based on food sovereignty and sustainability. Moreover, it is necessary to reinforce controls at the external borders to avoid the entry of pest and diseases;

23. demands that the new CAP should help to tackle unfair trade practices and avoid behaviour that is harmful to vulnerable actors in the agri-food chain, in particular farmers. The European Commission is therefore asked to strengthen EU rules on unfair trading practices in the agri-food supply chain, including punishing purchases below production costs, also considering the possibility of concretely supporting the bargaining power of the weakest components of the supply chain;

24. considers that, alongside this directive on unfair practices, it would also be necessary to make contractualisation attractive for producers, to introduce additional measures on price transparency and to ensure fair competition in the distribution, agri-food and agri-supply sectors ⁽²⁾;

25. calls on the EU to redefine its agriculture export policy, without damaging agricultural communities of third countries, giving priority to EU internal trade and reducing EU agricultural imports;

⁽²⁾ Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Unfair trading practices in the food supply chain (OJ C 387, 25.10.2018, p. 48).

26. calls on the EU to use its influence as the world's largest market, food importer and exporter to change the international agricultural trade rules introduced in 1994 (WTO) so as to encourage greater fairness, reciprocity and solidarity in trade relations⁽³⁾. WTO activities cannot be disconnected from the 2030 Agenda of the SDGs as the functioning of the real economy needs public regulations in order to mitigate market dysfunctions;

27. points out that the future reform of the CAP 2027+ should lay the groundwork for Ukraine's and other candidate countries' accession to the EU, with due regard for the well-being of EU farmers as well as for the necessity to increase funding, by adapting the CAP budget to support EU agricultural production. In addition, innovative financial instruments that can better support agricultural income across Europe need to be identified. Considering the importance of Food Stability, Security, Sustainability and Solidarity, points out that any CAP 2027+ should be executed in the perspective of a long term EU Food Strategy, that looks into angles such as product choices, food volumes, suitable key production areas, linkages between consumer concentrations and secure supply chains;

28. calls on the European Commission to develop instruments for supply management of agricultural production in the European Union. This should involve public stocks to avoid speculation and stabilise market prices, common export policy for agricultural products and humanitarian support, in order to mitigate social unrest in areas affected by crop failure or threatened by hunger due to climate change or wars, quotas of production, price tunnels defining the minimum and maximum limits between which the agreed price can vary, to take into account production costs;

29. points out that the flexibility of biofuel policies must also be considered as a market regulation instrument in order to prioritise food uses and serve as a shock absorber in the event of too great a differential between supply and demand;

30. emphasises that the CAP must meet the food needs of the EU population and strike a balance between exports and imports;

31. stresses the importance of stabilising food markets by avoiding significant fluctuations, which have a very strong impact on both consumers and farmers;

32. agricultural and livestock imports into the EU must meet equivalent environmental and public health standards as EU products, so the EU must ensure that these standards are enforced and complied with in trade agreements with non-EU countries;

Simplifying the CAP and ensuring a fair distribution of resources to support future farming

33. strongly supports the calls to simplify procedures for carrying out agricultural activities supported under the CAP after 2027+. Reducing the administrative burden for farmers and producing consistent and easily implemented rules for IT control will make their activities more efficient by reducing unnecessary procedures, enabling them to focus on production, innovation and investment, and making the agricultural sector more resilient and sustainable. Calls for the EU's requirements for the national strategic plans to be simplified for the next funding period and for EU implementing regulations to be adopted more quickly, as they have sometimes been adopted very late during the current funding period, making implementation more difficult. Such simplifications should apply to all areas of the CAP, including rural development;

34. stresses that no time can be lost in rolling out new regulation to make European agriculture profitable once again. This will require new principles for granting direct payments and better market regulation. This includes reviewing the rules of capping payments to avoid further weakening the competitive position of smaller and medium-sized enterprises. The compliance with requirements arising from the Green Deal must be timely. In doing so, particular attention must also be paid to avoiding additional bureaucracy. Measures for the transit and import of food from third countries must be improved in this regard. It is unacceptable that European farmers have to cope with the shortcomings of existing regulation. Aid for Ukraine in its struggle to survive should be coordinated so as not to harm the EU's agricultural sector. European agriculture must be safeguarded to prevent any loss of European solidarity when it comes to continuing support for Ukraine as it fights for its freedom and European values;

⁽³⁾ Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — The CAP after 2020 (OJ C 342, 12.10.2017, p. 10).

35. takes note of the vote on the simplification of certain CAP rules to change six of the nine Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAECs) and to exempt small farms from compliance controls. Calls for a comprehensive assessment of the impact that the implementation of the Green Deal and other policies will have on agriculture and on food security while bearing in mind the concerns of the farming community;

36. emphasises how important it is for the EU to help Ukraine. Nevertheless, suggests proposing Ukrainian products in non-EU countries in order to prevent a disturbance of the European market and in order to preserve food security in third countries that are more in need;

37. points out that the CAP should support agricultural advice education and training, include tools that would support farmers with innovative solutions for improving sustainability, as well as environmentally-friendly and appropriate consumer behaviour. It should also promote gender equality in farming professions, create the conditions for the development of family farms, and safeguard the cultural aspects of rural areas;

38. calls on the European Commission to plan a 'fair guaranteed income' instrument for farms that do not earn a satisfactory level of income from their agricultural activities. This instrument should complement agricultural income, provide a social security guarantee and help to make agricultural income comparable to other sectors. The instrument could be applied for farms that play an important role in maintaining multipurpose agricultural land such as High Nature Farming area, farms that use traditional production models and farms that are needed in order to prevent the abandonment of agricultural activities and the depopulation of rural areas, as well as the preservation of high nature value systems such as those dedicated to extensive livestock farming, mountain farming or native breeds;

39. believes that the CAP should ensure a fair income for agricultural producers. It is also important to guarantee relative stability of rules and incentives;

40. calls for the demographic challenge perspective to be incorporated into the CAP, with additional funds and targeted policies favouring regions in which – due to depopulation, ageing or a combination of the two – the future of farming is compromised;

41. considers that in order to cope with the issue of an ageing population of farmers, support for young farmers is needed for example for business takeovers and the transfer of knowledge. Young farmers after all keep the culture alive, contribute to the socio-economic cohesion of rural areas, and are open to innovative solutions; in this regard, asks the European Commission to promote and facilitate the activation of an extraordinary plan for generational renewal, which favours access to land for young people, the dissemination of innovation and services for agricultural businesses to make them more efficient, vital and sustainable; Support should also be extended beyond the first five years since the opening of their farm for young farmers implementing agroecological methods, in order to support its growth and competitiveness in a stable way and to encourage the generational renewal of farms by setting up public farm banks;

42. points out that in addition to aid for installation, better coordination between the CAP and the land policies of the Member States is essential because access to land is the essential step to ensure generational renewal. Also, recalls that it is during the installation of young farmers that investments offer the greatest possible leverage to guide operations towards sustainability, whether environmental, economic or social. In this context, recalls the recommendations made by the European Parliament own-initiative report on farmland concentration in the EU and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure adopted by the FAO in 2012 ⁽⁴⁾;

43. highlights that agriculture is often seen as an unattractive profession and that the challenges facing rural areas exacerbate this problem. The establishment of young people in rural areas with access to services and leisure and employment opportunities is key to preserving agriculture across the EU. In order to achieve this, believes it is vital for aid to be tailored to the actual agricultural and climate situation in the regions, and thus to ensure the economic profitability of farms, and thus generational renewal;

⁽⁴⁾ Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Agro-ecology (OJ C 106, 26.3.2021, p. 19).

44. moreover, calls on the European Commission to reform the methods for direct payments in order to reflect the circumstances in which agricultural activities are carried out and to thus be able to redistribute payments across the various types and sizes of farms, according to the needs determined in the territory. Specifically, it should introduce mandatory and increased redistributive payments (payments for small and medium-size farms), capping CAP subsidies in order to increase the revenue of all farmers. Moreover, calls on the European Commission to increase the use of financial instruments to enable farmers to access credit;

45. advises continuing the current CAP possibilities for Member States to balance Pillar One to Pillar Two payments and interventions, and recommends that direct payments shift from a surface-based approach to a system combining multiple factors: labour intensity, farm size, owner type (supporting in particular young farmers), agricultural added value, areas in which climate change adaptation measures are carried out, areas in which sustainable agriculture is practiced and the degree of use and protection of environmental resources (impact of activities on the environment). This shift must be gradual, so that farmers can adapt to the new rules;

46. also advises complementing direct payments with countercyclical subsidies in order to stabilise farmers' income in a context of unpredictable crises;

47. points out that the CAP should support investments that contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation and that alleviate the pressures of farming on the environment;

48. considers it necessary to promote and incentivise the role of supply chain contracts, in order to ensure the stability of the system and allow farmers to plan in the medium-term;

49. recommends strengthening climate-friendly land management and food chains through the means of the Common Agricultural Policy. Also recommends that the Common Agricultural Policy takes into account agriculture that is facing the consequences of climate change and the risk of desertification. The CoR believes that carbon farming represents an opportunity to provide economic compensation to farmers who carry out regenerative activities in rainfed areas with low or no economic yield, thus avoiding the land being abandoned and enabling generational renewal and the maintenance of food production. In this respect, the provisions of the current Common Agricultural Policy are inadequate;

Developing rural areas

50. points out the importance of supporting the development of rural areas to ensure a high quality, pleasant living environment for the people living there, as well as ensuring that crop farming, livestock farming and the natural environment are sustainable. Calls for a European Rural Agenda and the consolidation of the work achieved by the Rural Pact and based on the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas, encouraging the deployment of support that takes into account the traditional, family-based and land-based agricultural production model;

51. calls for generational renewal to be encouraged in rural businesses, through different support measures and instruments such as rural business banks;

52. points out that rural areas should strive to provide a high quality of life and serve as havens for local and regional identity and cultural heritage. Therefore, it emphasises that the CAP 2027+ must contribute to shaping the development of agricultural activity and additionally, by taking a comprehensive approach together with other EU funds, the development of rural areas; these should be seen as spaces where agricultural and non-agricultural activities are carried out, and as spaces providing direct support services and the infrastructure necessary to create the conditions for rural and agricultural competitiveness. Rural areas are a place where people live, so they must meet social, welfare and recreational needs, directly influencing the quality of life of rural populations. For robust rural development, access to high-speed internet is of paramount importance, alongside a well-established infrastructure in education, culture, medicine, and healthcare;

53. calls for LEADER, the community-led local development (CLLD) instrument which allows small territories to propose their own local development strategies, to be bolstered and simplified. Emphasises that cohesion policy, alongside all other EU policies and funds, should support and complement CAP action. In line with the quota for sustainable urban development funding (currently 10 %), 5 % of cohesion policy funds should be earmarked for rural non-agricultural development under CLLD mechanisms;

54. points out that merging EAGF and EAFRD, as reported by the CoR REGHUB network, has led to more bureaucracy. Moreover, the withdrawal of the EAFRD from the rest of the Structural Funds has made it more difficult to find synergy between those funds and more complicated in terms of evaluation and performance indicators;

55. stresses that the economic and social development of rural areas should be agreed on in a holistic manner, considering other funds, such as regional policy funds; irrespective of this, the development of rural areas must remain a substantial part of the next CAP and should also be supported by the next cohesion policy;

56. recommends the active participation of rural regions and their residents in the prompt implementation of renewable energy systems, technologies, and infrastructure, fostering a sustainable, cost-effective, and energy-independent supply that concurrently enhances these regions competitiveness in the EU. Highlights that digitalisation and the use of new technologies can make farming more efficient, productive and sustainable. Precision agriculture techniques using GPS and IoT devices allow farmers to monitor crop health, soil conditions and weather in real time, optimising the use of resources and reducing waste. Advanced data analytics and machine learning provide insights for better crop plans, pest control and irrigation management, increasing productivity and minimising environmental impact;

57. considers it necessary to increase research and innovation when it comes to mobility solutions in order to improve transport and communication networks in rural areas and thereby increase quality of life;

Accelerating the transition to sustainable agriculture

58. points out that the CAP should support the mitigation and adaptation to climate change and the fight against the sources of environmental pollution, as well as ensuring proper welfare of livestock and therefore, the budget of the CAP post 2027 should match the needs of the sector and the level of ambition with the primary aim of guaranteeing food security;

59. calls for an end to cage rearing, as called for in a recent successful citizens' initiative and as it urged in its opinion on the CAP, highlighting the need for improved animal welfare standards;

60. considers that the application of sustainable development principles, including the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy, must rely primarily on incentives rather than coercion, and be based on thorough scientific analysis and social consultations regarding the real environmental impact. Also, it will be necessary to consider simplifications for farms certified as organic. For this reason, a CAP budget for greening should be supplemented by additional resources;

61. insists that farmers must be supported in the transition to sustainable farming, which must reflect all three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental aspects). In order to complement the CAP budget dedicated to eco-schemes and agro-environmental measures, recommends, as proposed in the CoR opinion on agroecology, that, in order to promote the agro-ecological transition, the Member States introduce a system of bonuses as part of the eco-schemes of the new common agricultural policy;

62. points out, as reported by the CoR Reghub network, that differences between eco-schemes from the first pillar and agri-environmental measures from the second pillar are difficult to communicate to applicants and that there is a risk of overlap between the two instruments;

63. requests the establishment of national funds that support the implementation and uptake of integrated and sustainable pest management. The financial resources for these funds could, inter alia, be provided by a risk-based taxation on plant protection products, by contributions from retailers, or by penalty payments ⁽³⁾;

⁽³⁾ Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on sustainable use of pesticides (OJ C 188, 30.5.2023, p. 43).

64. points out that the CAP should continue to strongly support prevention-oriented interventions that help preventing and compensating damages and build resilience to climate change, including floods and droughts. It should do so by financing both sustainable water management, for example by improving existing or building new irrigation systems, and flood protection, as well as reinforcing EU solidarity funds for farmers experiencing losses due to disasters. Particular recurrent weather conditions in certain regions must be deemed to be a critical situation in order to apply specific forms of flexibility or specific aid designs;

65. emphasises that the CAP must continue to strongly support interventions that help support sustainable forms of agricultural development, through various incentives, which reduce greenhouse gas emission, the use of environmentally harmful plant protection substances, synthetic fertilizers, inappropriate water and energy consumption, and the use of chemicals hazardous to human health and animal welfare while contributing to food security across the world and in maintaining the external and internal competitiveness of the EU's farmers and agri-food sector; For this reason, it is essential to expand ecological focus areas, as well as to take into account the existing scientific and technological advances and to promote their implementation among farmers;

66. emphasises that the CAP should support the improvement of efficiency in natural water use, the restoration of natural water cycles and scientific research seeking to enhance the resilience of plants and animals to climate change and reduce the effects of greenhouse gas emissions – including agronomic progress – while increasing carbon storage and sequestration; and therefore, underlines that the CAP should continue to interlink with the Horizon Europe Programme 2027+, which should once again contain a significant budget for Societal Challenge 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment';

67. emphasises that agricultural production should take into account climate change and adaptation practices, recognising that the resource of water used for crop production should be used appropriately and should not harm groundwater sources. Underlines that its usage should be limited by optimisation of irrigation and that, when possible and relevant, water-intensive crops must be replaced by crops more adapted to the climate. It also highlights the need to preserve and strengthen the potential of forested areas and fallow grassland located near agricultural areas, as they serve as protective buffers and enhance biodiversity;

68. calls for further reflection on how to support woody crops, considering the difficulties EU farmers are facing. This support should include market regulation through management of production volumes and improvement of quality and the establishment of an emergency system at European level in case a crisis arises;

69. calls for extensive livestock farming to be declared strategic, and for it to be supported by special funds from the CAP, because of its role in managing vast areas of land in mountain regions and other regions with natural constraints, taking into account its undeniable contribution through the provision of multiple ecosystem services, ranging from the provision of safe and high-quality healthy food to the preservation of landscapes and the associated biodiversity, fire prevention and its contribution to encouraging people to settle in remote areas, among other benefits;

70. points out that agricultural land is intended for agricultural production. A minimum percentage of agricultural land should be put on hold in order to improve crop efficiency and the regeneration of soils. In addition to food or feed production, the use of agricultural land for biomass production for energy purposes should be promoted in carefully selected EU areas. 'Conditionality' should not exclude land from agricultural production, nor should it promote or require direct payments to be contingent on compulsory following of any part of the area. Instead, conditionality should support land management practices, especially on low-quality soils, that improve profitability, contribute to soil enrichment with organic matter, enhance its sorption capacity and help protect biodiversity, groundwater and surface water sources; emphasises the importance of disconnecting farm food production from the one-sided production model based on fossil energy. It is regionally possible to accumulate surface area for renewable energy, for example, from annual fallow land; recalls that agro-ecology and sustainable agricultural practices cultivate living soils, which support healthy plants, store significant amounts of carbon and water, and exhibit greater resistance to drought and high temperatures;

71. recognises the need to support the food processing sector; the development of local renewable energy and the reduction of the financial and environmental costs associated with sustainable transportation, storage and packaging systems;

Creating a food system for healthy people and a healthy planet

72. emphasises that the CAP should promote producers of healthy, sustainably produced food, such as organic food, as well as production utilising circular systems; recommends that the introduction of the circular system be stepped up in the treatment of livestock waste in order to harness this in agronomic (compost and organic fertilisers) terms and to move towards lean, efficient resource management;

73. stresses the need to see waste as resources, for example, reclaimed water, with its essential nutrient inputs, for irrigating areas where there is a shortage, or cereal straw residue that is processed to become a productive asset for livestock farming, green building or mulch;

74. emphasises that food made available to EU residents must be good for their health. Therefore, the primary goal of improving food quality should be to strive for the highest health-promoting attributes, understood as characteristics contributing to consumers' long and healthy lives. Believes that food products with proven negative effects on consumers' health should be increasingly heavily taxed, depending on their composition, caloric value, nutritional value, degree of processing and addicting qualities. The funds yielded by this tax could help finance the CAP 2027+. Additionally, it stresses that food on the EU market should not come from external suppliers unless it meets at least the same standards as food produced within the EU;

75. recommends that the Commission develops new guidelines within the current public procurement framework to encourage local and regional authorities to organise their tenders so that they can give preference to food produced sustainably near the place where it is purchased. This should apply particularly to food served in schools, kindergartens, care institutions and healthcare facilities and at public sector events;

76. acknowledges that locally produced food must carry a visible label of origin and recommends that the CAP 2027+ continue to offer interventions that support promotion, marketing and local sale of locally produced food, also by promoting the building of market halls;

77. highlights the need to step up research and implementation and to continue to address the importance of the Agriculture Innovation and Knowledge Exchange System (AKIS), emphasising that food production is a field open to innovation; underlines that sustainable food security also relies on a substantial number of well-trained farmers possessing extensive knowledge of their regions' specificities, climate dynamics, sustainable farming practices and the implementation of a resilient and sustainable food system;

78. regrets that the strategic dialogues on the future of EU agriculture launched by the European Commission do not include any local or regional authorities;

Strengthening the role of the regions in the governance of the CAP

79. calls on the European Commission to include the European Committee of the Regions as a full-fledged advisory body in the formulation of the future CAP. Direct communication between the regional managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans and the European Commission should be encouraged. Regional and local authorities represented at the CoR are inherently linked to rural areas and thus to agriculture. They also represent urban areas and consumers, and work for environmental protection and socio-economic order;

80. points out that collaboration between national and regional managing authorities and between national and regional monitoring committees should be improved and formalised. An electronic exchange platform could facilitate communication between the regional and national level;

81. points out that representatives of European farmers must be involved at every stage and every level when creating the framework for the CAP 2027+ and recommends establishing an appropriate forum to involve the European Committee of the Regions and representatives of different stakeholders, in particular farmers representatives, to contribute to the elaboration of the CAP 2027+;

82. points out that the new CAP delivery model has led, as reported by the CoR REGHUB network, to an increase in administrative burden for the regional managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans, a lack of flexibility to adapt the CAP Strategic Plan and some delays in the implementation of the policy;

83. suggests, according to the results of the REGHUB consultation, allowing changes in the Strategic Plans without seeking approval from the European Commission when obvious errors appear and when these errors do not affect objectives and milestones of the plans at national level;

84. considers that more flexibility and focus on results would be needed for the evaluation of the CAP Strategic Plans, rather than specific implementation details, and believes that it would be useful to define common sets of indicators for each intervention, without going far beyond regulatory obligations;

85. emphasises that the above-mentioned objectives of the CAP 2027+ can only be achieved with stronger multilevel governance and increased shared management and decentralisation of the policy as a result of which an area-specific approach becomes possible, allowing for fairer direct payments to farmers (for instance for independent and small and medium-size businesses) and better opportunities for long-term planning;

86. believes firmly that many aspects crucial for the implementation of the CAP can best be carried out at regional level. Therefore calls on the European Commission to grant significantly greater powers to regions (NUTS2) in the CAP after 2027, in particular for rural development. The CAP should be decentralised and implemented based on regional strategies for food security and rural development. Funding for rural development should come from Structural and national funds. Regional and local authorities should stipulate that agricultural production areas are protected from other forms of land use;

87. emphasises that the objectives of the CAP 2027+ can be better achieved by restoring the autonomy of regional rural development programming where this is traditionally and constitutionally the responsibility of farmers, strengthening multilevel governance, shared management and decentralisation;

88. emphasises that the CAP needs to be restructured by transferring design and management to the regional level, while safeguarding the consistent adherence to the common European goals of the Common Agricultural Policy. Conditions for food security and rural development, conditions for food distribution under the 'farm to fork' strategy, and goals related to biodiversity conservation, landscape protection, protected areas, biocenotic enclaves, biological corridors, groundwater and surface water protection, creation of buffer zones, species and genus protection (such as pollinators) and standards for promoting regional products for the different approaches to sustainability in the agricultural sector should all be determined within one strategy. The management and design of the scheme to support it must be enabled, adapted to each region's structural situation;

89. calls for the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture to be closely monitored, in particular by highlighting the importance of regions, which have first-hand knowledge of the challenges and needs of agriculture at local level.

Brussels, 19 June 2024.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Vasco ALVES CORDEIRO