

Accompanying European farmers through the European Green Deal

Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting in Zagreb (23/09/2023)

Recognising that:

1. Restoring Europe's food sovereignty and implementing the agro-ecological transition will not be done without the full cooperation of agricultural and agri-food actors.
2. The war in Ukraine and the current cost of living crisis and the aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic are creating the fear that supply chains may become powerful geopolitical levers. At the same time, several legislative proposals by the European Commission are either cutting agricultural yields or diminishing the available arable land area, endangering food security in Europe.
3. It is essential to provide support to farmers in reducing their use of inputs such as pesticides, fertilizers, and antibiotics. We strongly believe that the CAP, with its eco-schemes, agrienvironmental programs promoting innovation, and farm advisory systems, should play a significant role in assisting farmers in this endeavour. We fully endorse the goal of reducing the reliance on these inputs in agriculture, as it benefits the environment, consumers, and farmers themselves. The implementation of precision farming and data-driven efficiency improvements can make valuable contributions towards achieving this objective.
4. European consumers are increasingly sensitive to produce sold as "zero pesticide", "grown without synthetic pesticides", "without pesticide residue", "high environmental value", "originating from organic farming", etc.¹
5. Individuals, mostly from urban areas, are increasingly distant from the agricultural world and its realities.
6. Studies analysing the negative impact of conventional plant protection products and fertilizers on water, biodiversity, air and animal health are becoming more and more common and have produced irrefutable evidence.
7. NGOs and other civil society groups are taking up these issues and have led the public debate on topics such as glyphosate or neonicotinoid bans. Some media and opinion leaders have relayed these positions uncritically, without always seeing the positive initiatives already undertaken in favour of the agro-ecological transition within the agricultural sector itself.
8. The battle to stop biodiversity loss in the EU must remain an urgent economic and environmental imperative to both guarantee the extraordinary variety of life and help maintain a healthy and resilient society.
9. These concerns are reflected in increasingly strict European and national policies with regard to conventional plant protection products, going as far as the prohibition of certain substances.
10. Some bans lead to technical dead ends (eg. neonicotinoids on beets², *Drosophila suzukii* on cherry trees, Phosmet on rapeseed, etc.), due to a lack of existing alternative solutions.

¹ "ONE BITE AT A TIME: CONSUMERS AND THE TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD Analysis of a survey of European consumers on attitudes towards sustainable food", The European Consumer Organisation, June 2020 https://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/beuc-x-2020042_consumers_and_the_transition_to_sustainable_food.pdf

² Neonicotinoids: the beet industry hit in the heart", European Scientist, 25.01.2023, retrieved 28.05.2023 <https://www.europeanscientist.com/en/features/neonicotinoids-the-beet-industry-hit-in-the-heart-gilriviere-wekstein-interview/>

11. Whether a farmer is engaged in organic farming, either through the EU organic products label or one of the over 190 certification schemes³, or in conventional farming, he needs to protect his crops in order to guarantee the food safety and food security of his production while remaining economically viable and competitive.
12. Alternative methods to conventional phytopharmaceutical products are being developed at ever faster rates, but do not, to date, respond to all crop protection issues. European changes to environmental regulations must take into account the time required for the development and production of these new technologies as they are brought to market at prices adequate for European farmers.
13. The path of progress for a combined successful crop protection and ecological transition goes through a combination of new techniques and alternative solutions. Existing solutions require support and training to enable as many people as possible to take ownership of them (farmers, agricultural advisers, agro-technicians, etc.)
14. European agricultural policy cannot be a one-size-fits-all system tailored for large agribusinesses, but must take into account the diversity of European farmers and the differences that exist, mainly in land use and farm size between member states. For example, Romanian, Slovenian and Greek farms on average cover 3.6, 6.7 and 6.9 ha respectively, compared to 58.59 and 58.74 ha in Germany and France⁴.

Acknowledging that:

1. The [Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation](#)⁵ aims to slash chemical pesticides use and risk by half by 2030 for each EU country, an arbitrary number set by the EC which does not respect the progress that has already been made in various member states.
2. The [European Farmers' Deal, EPP Vision for Agriculture in Europe](#)⁶ resolution, approved by the EPP Political Assembly in Munich calls for the EPP to assume a leading role as the defender of the strategic European agricultural sector.
3. As per the 2018 [The Future of Agriculture in Europe](#)⁷ white paper, "YEPP supports the European Council's conclusions as part of the EU's 2030 Climate Change and Energy Policy Framework which recognises the special relationship between agriculture, the environment and food security."
4. The European Union must remain committed to the goals of the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#)⁸ and its associated action plan in order to preserve Europe's biosphere.

³ "Farm certification schemes for sustainable agriculture – state of play and overview in the EU and in key global producing countries, concepts & methods", AND International: Tanguy CHEVER, Adèle GONÇALVES, Clément LEPEULE, August 2022.

<https://bit.ly/3AYQkiz>

⁴ The Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union: The Present and the Future: EU Member States Point of View : Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "The Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union - the Present and the Future", Wigier, Marek, et al., editors. 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325648892_The_past_present_and_future_of_the_CAP_-_the_Hungarian_viewpoint

⁵ Regulation 2022/0196(COD). "Sustainable use of plant protection product".

[https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2022/0196\(COD\)&l=en](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2022/0196(COD)&l=en)

⁶ "Resolution: European Farmers' Deal EPP Vision for Agriculture in Europe ", EPP, 05 May 2023.

https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2023/05/Paper_Agriculture_Munich.pdf

⁷ "The Future of Agriculture in Europe White Paper", YEPP, 2018. <https://youthpepp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/The-Future-of-Agriculture-in-Europe.pdf> ⁸ COM(2020) 380 final "EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030", European Commission, 20 May 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0380>

YEPP calls on:

1. The European Commission to halt the implementation of the Nature Restoration and Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation.
2. The European Commission to acknowledge that more than 30% of some member states' territories, such as Slovenia, Croatia and Bulgaria are considered sensitive and protected, where the proposed complete ban of phytopharmaceuticals would be devastating for many smaller farmers⁸.
3. The European Commission to implement a complete ban of phytopharmaceuticals only in areas where their use has already been proven harmful, i.e. lakes, rivers and other water habitats.
4. The European Commission to more actively encourage collaboration between agricultural research institutions, farmers, and industry stakeholders to accelerate the development and implementation of new crop protection techniques.
5. The EPP to resolutely maintain its course as the voice and defender of European farmers and rural communities.
6. The EPP to advocate for a reformed but strong CAP that puts forward young farmers, new technologies and a strong agricultural research and education sector that will ensure Europe maintains its commitment to the European Green Deal and preserve Europe's biodiversity.
7. The Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development to set up a special Expert Board or Group for "orphaned" pesticides and other products which are set to be retired but currently do not possess adequate replacements. The Expert Board or Group is to act as a liaison between regulators, researchers and farmers, ensuring products are only retired once adequate replacements have been developed. The Expert Board or Group is also to help identify key research areas, prioritize the adoption of integrated pest management (IPM) practices, decentralizing decision-making processes and help accelerate the search for replacements wherever possible.

⁸ "Urban sprawl into Natura 2000 network over Europe. Conservation Biology", Concepción, Elena. 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Percent-area-covered-by-the-Natura-2000-network-in-the-28member-states-of-the-European-fig1_348088983