

1 **Competitive, Resilient and Sovereign European Agriculture**

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9 **Preamble**

10 European agriculture is the foundation of our food sovereignty, rural economies, cultural heritage, and  
11 the world's highest production and environmental standards. Our family farms deliver safe, high-quality  
12 food and sustain vibrant rural communities and essential public goods. Yet European farmers are being  
13 met with issues, such as an ageing farming population with too few successors, rising costs,  
14 administrative burdens that exceed the capacity of small producers, environmental obligations imposed  
15 without adequate compensation, and trade agreements that expose European farmers to competition  
16 from regions operating under fundamentally different standards all threaten the viability of the sector.<sup>1</sup>

17 Slovenia exemplifies the structural fragility affecting much of European agriculture. Average farm size  
18 remains under 7 ha, with more than 60% of holdings below 5 ha, parcels scattered across complex  
19 ownership arrangements, and conditions for modernisation severely constrained.<sup>2</sup> The age structure is  
20 deeply unfavourable: 33% of farm owners are over 60, while only 4.9% are under 35,<sup>3</sup> well below the  
21 already alarming EU average of 12% of farmers under 40.<sup>4</sup> Succession is blocked by high entry costs,  
22 fragmented inheritance, and a near-total absence of rural housing for young people.<sup>3</sup> Marginal and hilly  
23 areas face accelerating abandonment, with meadows converting to forest, traditional landscapes  
24 disappearing, and risks of fire and erosion rising on the Karst plateau and in mountainous regions.<sup>5</sup>  
25 Prime lowland soils are being irreversibly consumed by logistics zones, infrastructure, and housing,  
26 with spatial planning decisions that consistently neglect long-term food security.<sup>6</sup> Self-sufficiency  
27 stands at only 27% in fruit and 36 to 41% in vegetables, with production fragmented, seasonal, and  
28 weather-dependent.<sup>7, 8</sup>

29 Slovenia's regulatory environment compounds these difficulties. With the EU's highest Natura 2000  
30 coverage at 37.5% of territory,<sup>9</sup> strict limits on fertilisation, mowing, construction, land consolidation,  
31 and plant protection product use are imposed with compensation mechanisms that rarely cover actual  
32 production losses.<sup>9</sup> Slovenia authorises fewer active substances than most neighbouring countries, new  
33 formulations reach the small market with significant delays or not at all, and the humid climate  
34 heightens disease pressure on fragmented parcels.<sup>10</sup> When the EU withdraws an active substance,  
35 Slovenia frequently lacks a viable replacement, leaving producers exposed to economic losses with no  
36 realistic means of protection.<sup>10</sup> The Commission's Food and Feed Safety Omnibus of December 2025  
37 acknowledged that no new conventional active substances had been approved in six years and that more

38 than 80 substances had been withdrawn, and proposed mutual recognition reforms to address this  
39 problem.<sup>11</sup> Primary producers' bargaining position in the food supply chain remains structurally weak:  
40 a Commission evaluation of December 2025 confirmed that a pervasive fear of retaliation continues to  
41 prevent farmers from challenging unfair contractual terms.<sup>12</sup>

42 Germany faces a structural crisis of its own. The number of agricultural holdings has fallen from  
43 approximately 458,000 in 2000 to around 255,000 today, a decline of roughly 44%.<sup>13</sup> Dairy farms fell  
44 below 50,000 for the first time in 2024, with nearly 28,000 lost in a single decade.<sup>14</sup> The agricultural  
45 workforce has contracted by approximately 62,000 since 2020,<sup>15</sup> while input costs have risen sharply  
46 and many farms cannot compensate through higher sale prices.<sup>16</sup> The human cost is increasingly visible:  
47 studies indicate that one in four German farmers experiences symptoms of burnout,<sup>17</sup> consistent with  
48 European Parliament Research Service findings confirming that agricultural workers face significantly  
49 higher fatality rates, stress levels, and suicide rates than workers in other sectors.<sup>18</sup> Germany's wolf  
50 population now comprises 219 packs, with approximately 4,300 livestock killed in around 1,100 attacks  
51 in 2024 and herd protection expenditure reaching €23.4 million.<sup>19</sup> Despite Germany having notified the  
52 EU Commission of a favourable conservation status and the wolf's reclassification under the Bern  
53 Convention, practical management tools for affected pastoral farmers remain insufficient.<sup>19</sup>

54 These challenges are not exceptional. The average EU farmer is now 57 years old with only 12% under  
55 40.<sup>4</sup> Farmers' gross income across the EU averages only approximately 60% of wages in comparable  
56 sectors,<sup>20</sup> and risk management tool uptake in 2024 ran 89% below planned CAP milestones.<sup>20</sup> The  
57 agricultural workforce is projected to fall from 17 million in 2020 to 7.7 million by 2030.<sup>21</sup>

58 The EU-Mercosur Partnership Agreement, signed on 17 January 2026<sup>22</sup> and entering provisional  
59 application from 1 May 2026,<sup>23</sup> has worsened some of these vulnerabilities. Mercosur countries produce  
60 under significantly lower environmental, labour, and plant protection standards, enabling price  
61 advantages that constitute a form of systematic competitive dumping against European producers  
62 operating under far stricter requirements.<sup>22</sup> The most exposed Slovenian sectors are beef cattle, oilseed  
63 and protein feed crops, and the sugar chain.<sup>10</sup> The scale of farmer opposition was demonstrated in  
64 December 2025, when an estimated 10,000 farmers converged on Brussels to oppose the deal.<sup>24</sup> On 21  
65 January 2026, the European Parliament voted 334 to 324 to refer the agreement to the Court of Justice  
66 of the European Union,<sup>25</sup> yet the Commission proceeded to finalise provisional application on 23 March  
67 2026.<sup>23</sup> The risk is more than just economic: sustained price pressure drives farm abandonment, deepens  
68 import dependency, and erodes the food sovereignty which is a key part of European strategic  
69 autonomy.

70 The Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food (February 2025),<sup>26</sup> Generational Renewal Strategy  
71 (October 2025),<sup>4</sup> CAP Simplification Roadmap (May 2025),<sup>27</sup> and post-2027 CAP proposal<sup>28</sup> represent  
72 the most ambitious EU agricultural policy package in a generation. The Youth of the European People's  
73 Party welcomes these steps but insists that their value depends entirely on consistent and ambitious  
74 implementation, complemented by proportionate environmental obligations, functioning rural housing  
75 markets, and trade policies that do not systematically disadvantage farmers who have invested in  
76 meeting European standards.

77 **Recognizing that:**

78 · The ageing of the European farming population and the shortage of young successors constitute  
79 an existential structural threat. The average EU farmer is 57 years old<sup>4</sup> and only 12% are under 40.<sup>4</sup>  
80 In Slovenia, 33% of farm owners are over 60<sup>3</sup> and only 4.9% are under 35,<sup>3</sup> with succession blocked  
81 by high entry costs,<sup>3</sup> fragmented inheritance,<sup>3</sup> and lack of rural housing.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, agricultural  
82 holdings have declined by 44% since 2000,<sup>13</sup> with dairy farms falling below 50,000 for the first  
83 time in 2024.<sup>14</sup>

84 · Small-scale and fragmented land structures limit economies of scale, modernisation, and  
85 investment. Slovenian holdings average under 7 ha,<sup>2</sup> with over 60% below 5 ha<sup>2</sup> and parcels  
86 scattered across complex ownership arrangements, creating barriers that compound one another and  
87 prevent efficient production.<sup>2</sup>

88 · The abandonment of marginal agricultural land is accelerating. In Slovenia, steep and remote  
89 areas are being deserted, meadows are converting to forest,<sup>5</sup> traditional landscapes including the  
90 Haloze terraces are disappearing,<sup>5</sup> and risks of fire and erosion are rising on the Karst plateau and  
91 in mountainous regions.<sup>5</sup>

92 · Prime fertile soils are being irreversibly lost to urban development. In Slovenia, productive  
93 lowland areas are consumed by infrastructure, logistics zones, and housing,<sup>6</sup> with spatial planning  
94 decisions that neglect long-term food security<sup>6</sup> and where recultivation is practically impossible.<sup>6</sup>

95 · Self-sufficiency remains critically fragile. Slovenia records only 27% self-sufficiency in fruit<sup>7</sup>  
96 and 36 to 41% in vegetables,<sup>7</sup> with production being fragmented, seasonal, and weather-vulnerable.<sup>8</sup>

97 · Administrative burdens disproportionately affect small family farms. The complexity of CAP  
98 and national procedures overwhelms producers without dedicated administrative staff,<sup>2</sup> generating  
99 under-ambitious project applications<sup>26</sup> and diverting attention from production.<sup>2</sup>

100 · The weak bargaining position of primary producers allows processors and retailers to capture  
101 value that should accrue at farm level. The Commission's December 2025 evaluation confirmed  
102 that the fear of retaliation prevents farmers from challenging unfair contractual terms<sup>12</sup> and that  
103 bargaining imbalances persist despite the 2019 UTP Directive.<sup>12</sup>

104 · Nature conservation restrictions impose costs that are inadequately compensated. Slovenia's  
105 37.5% Natura 2000 coverage<sup>9</sup> imposes strict limits with compensation mechanisms that only  
106 partially offset actual production losses,<sup>9</sup> rendering otherwise legitimate environmental objectives  
107 counterproductive.

108 · Plant protection product regulation creates severe competitive disadvantages. In Slovenia,  
109 fewer active substances are authorised than in neighbouring countries,<sup>10</sup> new formulations are  
110 delayed or unavailable,<sup>10</sup> and the absence of viable replacements following EU withdrawals leaves  
111 producers exposed to losses with no realistic means of protection.<sup>10</sup> The Food and Feed Safety

112 Omnibus of December 2025 acknowledged that no new conventional active substances had been  
113 approved in six years,<sup>11</sup> while more than 80 had been withdrawn.<sup>11</sup>

114 · Regional inequalities between productive lowlands and hilly or mountainous farms are  
115 worsening. Hill and mountain farms in Slovenia face structurally higher costs<sup>5</sup> and near-total  
116 subsidy dependence,<sup>5</sup> with abandonment driving rural depopulation and village decline.<sup>5</sup>

117 · The disappearance of German family farms constitutes a structural crisis. With approximately  
118 255,000 holdings remaining, down from 458,000 in 2000,<sup>13</sup> and dairy farms below 50,000 for the  
119 first time,<sup>14</sup> consolidation is proceeding at a pace that threatens rural communities and small and  
120 medium family operations.

121 · The agricultural labour force is contracting sharply. In Germany, approximately 62,000 workers  
122 have left the sector since 2020.<sup>15</sup> At EU level, the workforce is projected to fall from 17 million in  
123 2020 to just 7.7 million by 2030.<sup>21</sup>

124 · Farmers' mental health is a growing crisis without adequate policy response. Studies indicate  
125 one in four German farmers experiences symptoms of burnout.<sup>17</sup> European Parliament Research  
126 confirms that agricultural workers face significantly higher fatality rates,<sup>18</sup> stress levels,<sup>18</sup> and  
127 suicide rates than the general working population.<sup>18</sup>

128 · Wolf-related livestock losses impose a disproportionate burden on smaller pastoral operations.  
129 In 2024, approximately 4,300 livestock were killed in around 1,100 wolf attacks in Germany,<sup>19</sup> with  
130 herd protection expenditure reaching €23.4 million,<sup>19</sup> while practical management tools remain  
131 insufficient despite the legal basis for regional management now existing.<sup>19</sup>

132 · The EU-Mercosur Partnership Agreement, entering provisional application from 1 May 2026,<sup>23</sup>  
133 creates structural risks for European agriculture. Mercosur countries operate under significantly  
134 lower regulatory standards,<sup>22</sup> which produces systematic price advantages that undercut European  
135 producers. An estimated 10,000 farmers converged on Brussels in December 2025 to oppose this  
136 deal,<sup>24</sup> and the European Parliament voted to refer it to the Court of Justice on 21 January 2026.<sup>25</sup>

137 · Farmers' gross income across the EU averages only 60% of wages in comparable sectors<sup>20</sup> and  
138 risk management tool uptake in 2024 ran 89% below planned CAP milestones,<sup>20</sup> which shows that  
139 the current policy framework is not delivering adequate income security.

#### 140 **Acknowledging that:**

141 · Family farms and rural communities form Europe's social, economic, and cultural backbone,  
142 requiring active and proportionate policy support rather than excessive or inconsistently applied  
143 regulation.<sup>1</sup>

144 · The Generational Renewal Strategy of October 2025 sets a target of doubling the share of young  
145 farmers by 2040,<sup>4</sup> proposes a mandatory starter pack of up to €300,000 in the next CAP,<sup>4</sup> and

146 recommends Member States allocate at least 6% of agricultural spending to generational renewal,<sup>4</sup>  
147 yet its impact depends on consistent Member State implementation.

148 · The Vision for Agriculture and Food of February 2025<sup>26</sup> and the CAP Simplification Roadmap  
149 of May 2025<sup>27</sup> represent meaningful steps toward reducing bureaucratic burden and strengthening  
150 support for small and medium-sized farms.

151 · The post-2027 CAP proposal introduces a mandatory €100,000 cap on direct payments to larger  
152 farms<sup>28</sup> and new instruments for generational renewal,<sup>28</sup> whose effectiveness depends on  
153 implementation that redirects resources toward family farms without disproportionately penalising  
154 labour-intensive holdings.

155 · In 2024, 164,000 young farmers received set-up support, exceeding planned targets,<sup>20</sup> and  
156 nearly 200,000 jobs were created through young farmer and rural development interventions.<sup>20</sup>

157 · The Food and Feed Safety Omnibus of December 2025 contains proposals to address PPP  
158 delays through mutual recognition and fast-track procedures for biological products,<sup>11</sup> which, if  
159 implemented properly, could begin to address the unequal access to crop protection tools affecting  
160 farmers in smaller Member States.

161 · Cross-border enforcement rules on unfair trading practices in the agri-food supply chain were  
162 adopted by the Council in March 2026,<sup>29</sup> establishing a mutual assistance mechanism that represents  
163 a step forward, but must be followed by a full revision of the UTP Directive.

164 · A dedicated Mercosur safeguards regulation establishes mechanisms for suspending tariff  
165 preferences on agricultural imports causing harm to EU producers, with faster procedures and  
166 simpler triggers than existing tools,<sup>22</sup> but these must be activated proactively to provide meaningful  
167 protection.

168 · The European Parliament's December 2024 plenary debate on farmers' working conditions and  
169 mental wellbeing<sup>18</sup> formally acknowledged the sector's mental health crisis, but this recognition  
170 must now translate into concrete funded support mechanisms.

171 · The inclusion of the wolf in Germany's Federal Hunting Act and its reclassification under the  
172 Bern Convention represent important steps toward workable regional management,<sup>19</sup> but  
173 implementation must be legally secure and practically accessible for affected farmers.

#### 174 **The Youth of the European People's Party Calls upon EU institutions to:**

175 · Implement the Generational Renewal Strategy of October 2025 with full ambition, including  
176 the mandatory starter pack of up to €300,000 in the post-2027 CAP,<sup>4</sup> simplified credit instruments,  
177 and dedicated rural housing solutions, with Member States required to allocate at least 6% of  
178 agricultural spending to generational renewal<sup>4</sup> and to address the specific barriers posed by  
179 fragmented inheritance structures in countries such as Slovenia.<sup>3</sup>

- 180 · Advance land consolidation and soil protection, including targeted support for inheritance  
181 reform,<sup>3</sup> a legally binding obligation to protect prime arable land from urban encroachment,<sup>6</sup> and  
182 investment in infrastructure serving hillside and mountain farming.<sup>5</sup>
- 183 · Implement genuine bureaucracy reduction across CAP procedures: raise lump-sum payments  
184 for small farmers,<sup>28</sup> fully digitalise application and reporting,<sup>27</sup> and establish one-stop advisory  
185 services accessible to producers without dedicated administrative staff,<sup>26</sup> ensuring that the fear of  
186 repayment demands no longer drives under-ambitious project applications.<sup>2</sup>
- 187 · Ensure that the cross-border UTP enforcement regulation adopted in March 2026<sup>29</sup> is  
188 implemented effectively by all Member States, followed by a revision of the UTP Directive  
189 including mandatory written contracts, mandatory mediation mechanisms, and strengthened rules  
190 for producer organisations,<sup>12</sup> so that structural imbalances of bargaining power are genuinely  
191 addressed.
- 192 · Ensure that Natura 2000 obligations on agricultural land are paired with full, timely, and  
193 adequate compensation calculated on actual production losses,<sup>9</sup> with consistent and proportionate  
194 enforcement and practical agronomic guidance for affected farmers.
- 195 · Adopt the Food and Feed Safety Omnibus with its mutual recognition provisions and fast-track  
196 pathway for biological products,<sup>11</sup> establish a binding principle that when an active substance is  
197 withdrawn a viable replacement must be authorised before the withdrawal takes effect,<sup>10</sup> and apply  
198 equivalent PPP standards as a condition on all agricultural imports entering the EU single market.<sup>11</sup>
- 199 · Treat the Mercosur Agreement's safeguard mechanisms as active instruments to be triggered  
200 proactively whenever import surges threaten sensitive sectors,<sup>22</sup> and insist, as a condition of the  
201 European Parliament's consent to the agreement's full ratification, on effective mirror clauses  
202 requiring Mercosur agricultural products to meet equivalent environmental, animal welfare, and  
203 plant protection standards to those imposed on European producers.<sup>25</sup>
- 204 · Invest in agricultural innovation and self-sufficiency, including precision farming, irrigation  
205 infrastructure, protein crop development, and climate resilience measures,<sup>26</sup> with priority given to  
206 raising horticultural and feed self-sufficiency in Member States with strategic vulnerabilities.<sup>7</sup>
- 207 · Address the mental health crisis in the farming sector with dedicated, funded support services  
208 including psychological counselling, peer support networks, and financial crisis mediation,<sup>17</sup>  
209 ensuring that the European Parliament's December 2024 recognition of this crisis<sup>18</sup> translates into  
210 concrete and enforceable commitments at EU and Member State level.
- 211 · Ensure effective and regionally differentiated wolf management, providing pastoral farmers in  
212 geographically constrained areas with legally secure and administratively streamlined tools for the  
213 removal of problem individuals,<sup>19</sup> and guarantee that herd protection funding is adequate and  
214 accessible regardless of farm size.<sup>19</sup>

215 · Implement the post-2027 CAP direct payment cap of €100,000<sup>28</sup> in a manner that does not  
216 disproportionately penalise labour-intensive holdings in regions with historically larger farm  
217 structures such as eastern Germany,<sup>13</sup> and redirect those freed resources toward small and medium  
218 family farms and generational renewal.<sup>4</sup>

219 · Organise, through YEPP and EPP member organisations, annual rural youth forums and  
220 training workshops for young farmers and rural activists, building a pan-European network for the  
221 exchange of best practices in sustainable family farming and generational renewal,<sup>4</sup> to guarantee  
222 that young farmers' voices are represented throughout the post-2027 CAP design process.

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