

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE CHAIR, MR J-F ISAMBERT, ON BEHALF OF THE COPA-COGECA WORKING PARTY ON CEREALS TO THE FARM TO FORK AND BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY PROPOSALS DURING THE MEETING OF THE CIVIL DIALOGUE GROUP ON ARABLE CROPS – CEREALS, OILSEEDS AND PROTEIN CROPS ON 17TH JUNE

European farmers, who have just proven their ability to mobilise and their resilience during the COVID-19 crisis, whose sales prices are declining and whose income is already below the rest of the working population, did not deserve to endure an administrative reduction of 30% to production on top of this, especially when they have made considerable efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of their production over the past decades, while providing among the safest food in the world and alternative energy.

While every farmer on this earth will be needed to feed humanity in 2050, the Commission notably proposes the following four quantified agricultural objectives, which are to be met by 2030:

- a 50% reduction in the use of plant protection products (PPPs);
- a 20% reduction in the use of fertilisers;
- 25% of agricultural surface area under organic farming;
- 10% of agricultural surface area dedicated to non-productive uses.

European Union food sovereignty, which is widely called for by the European leaders, and the pressing need to maintain production activity on European soil require a vision of sustainable growth. Not a path of decline with an uncertain environmental impact that will undoubtedly lead to an increase in food imports for Europeans. Imports are, very often, produced using PPPs that are banned in the European Union or are linked to deforestation and result in our food production being outsourced to third countries!

It is Europe's duty to facilitate an agri-ecological transition that allows the development of competitive and environmentally friendly agriculture to be reconciled. However, at the same time let us stop making consumers believe that plants (unlike humans and animals) should have to make do and that they require neither nutrients, care nor protection.

Cereal producers are deeply disappointed because they were expecting a pioneering road map from the Commission, one that integrates the most strategic instruments to take into account the existing and future advances in research and innovation in agronomy, digitalisation, robotics, genetics and biocontrol. In the face of climate challenges, increasing carbon sinks through crop productivity is a necessity, while also limiting emissions through fertilisation efficiency, crop practices, genetics and using decision-making support tools.

The proposal also turns a blind eye to the consequences for farmers and to keeping rural areas alive. The drop in production will reduce farmers' income even more and lead to bankruptcies, restructuring, an accelerated decline in the number of farms and an enlargement of holdings.

It overlooks the sustainability of the agri-food sector. This is not a strategy because it is not coupled with any impact assessment, neither at a local, regional, national or international level.

This is why producers call for pragmatism, for consistent tools and for farmers to be given the means to build the farming of the future. For this reason, they alert the authorities to the dangers linked to misusing indicators, which can give the impression that reduction is a solution. Let performance objectives be at the heart of our agriculture and let us bank on innovation to make European food sovereignty a true priority. To do this, words have to be put into action so that all European citizens can have access to safe, affordable and high-quality food.

In parallel to this, the European Commission presented its proposals for the revised 2021-2027 multiannual budget to the European Parliament. This was accompanied by an economic recovery plan in which the Commission announced that the CAP's rural development envelope would be reinforced with 15 billion euros over seven years. In reality, if we take into account inflation, this represents an agricultural budget down by 9% in comparison to the current financial framework. It is a fool's budget with more constraints and less funding, set in the context of a policy of reduction.
