



Brussels,
AGRI.A.1/MB

MINUTES

**WORKSHOP ON SUSTAINABILITY
JOINT MEETING WITH
THE MEMBERS OF THE CIVIL DIALOG GROUP ON CAP STRATEGIC PLANS
AND HORIZONTAL MATTERS
AND
THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE CAP STRATEGIC PLANS REGULATION**

*from 14:00 on Thursday, 15 February to 13:00 on Friday, 16 February 2024
in Brussels (CCAB Room 2.D) and online, via the Interactio platform*

Background: Discussion paper of 2nd February 2024.

Participants are invited to share further reflections and evidence in response to the discussion questions in writing with: AGRI-A1@ec.europa.eu.

Chair: Catherine GESLAIN-LANEELLE, DG AGRI Directorate A

Delegations present:

- Member States: All MS were represented, except CZ, CY, HR, SI.
- CDG organisations: all CDG member organisations were represented (cf. enclosed list), except BeeLife, CEPF, EFFAT, EFNCP, EMB, EUCOFEL, EUFRAS, EUROMALT, IPIF, Fertilizers Europe, PFP
- Ad hoc experts (cf. enclosed list).

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Day 1 - Thursday, 15 February 2024

The Chair introduced the aims of the workshop to collect evidence and views on the conditions, constraints, barriers, opportunities and needs of environmentally and climate sustainable farming that is compatible with productivity and economic viability/livelihoods of farmers.

1. SESSION 1: SUSTAINABILITY IN PERSPECTIVE

The session was framed by the interventions of the representatives of OECD, Horizon 2020 funded project ‘UNISECO’, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and BEUC.

The presentation from the **OECD** expert focused on the global position of the EU agriculture and aspects related to productivity and sustainability. This was based on the OECD [Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation report](#), which looks at the support estimate across 54 countries in the world including the European Union, as well as the recent OECD report titled [Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union](#).

- The EU remains a major global agrifood player, concentrating the value share in sectors such as livestock, dairy, sugar.
- Reflections were made in relation to the productivity growth in the EU that in many cases come from gains in labour productivity (reduction of farm labour). In recent years the EU agriculture has also seen increase in the use of inputs. It is important to combine productivity with improved environmental ambitions.
- The environmental performance of the EU agriculture is mixed with improvements in some areas (e.g., regarding the nutrient balance). In relation to GHG emissions, the EU performs well compared to other countries, even though GHG emissions from agriculture are increasing again in recent years.
- OECD provided reflections on agricultural income and the remaining income gap compared to non-farm sector.
- In relation to public support, the overview of the CAP shows a decrease of available budget over the years with an increased level of voluntary and mandatory constraints attached to the payments. A strong attention was drawn to the low funding dedicated to innovation and knowledge. Questions remain as the necessary transition for the agri-food sector and for the need of policy support to accompany this transition.

The representative from **BEUC** focused on key learnings from BEUC surveys and from Eurobarometer polls on consumers’ perceptions and expectations in relation to food sustainability.

- Consumers do not grasp the multidimensional nature of sustainability but mostly see it through the perspective of human health and the environment.
- There is often a mismatch between what consumers think makes a difference in terms of sustainable eating behaviour (e.g. ‘eating local’) and what scientific evidence shows is

most impactful (e.g. ‘eating meat less often’). Consumers tend to underestimate the impacts of their own eating habits and most of them (albeit to a varying degree across countries) say they have a healthy and sustainable diet already – yet current consumption patterns are not in line with scientific recommendations for healthy and sustainable diets, notably as regards the plant vs animal protein ratio.

- European consumers continue to prioritise taste, food safety and cost (attitude-behaviour gap), but two thirds say they are willing to eat more sustainably. Readiness is especially expressed to consume more seasonal fruit and vegetables and waste less food. Paying more for sustainable food or reducing consumption of meat and dairy is more challenging for many. The price, a lack of information, the challenge of identifying sustainable food options (in the shop, at the restaurant) as well as their limited availability are the main perceived barriers to sustainable eating.
- Consumers expect society, and governments in particular, to ensure the needed transition to sustainable food production and consumption. They expect farmers to receive support along the transition (incl. through subsidies). Recent opinion polls carried out during the farmers’ protests in some EU countries suggest that while consumers’ awareness of the economic situation of farmers has increased, and they want something to be done about it, their expectations for agriculture to become greener have not changed.
- There are clear expectations from consumers for sustainability information to be provided on food labels – although, at the same time, many feel there are too many logos and labels, which creates confusion. Consumers trust public authorities more than private companies when it comes to labels, with a clear demand for trustworthy information and transparency. The most recognised EU labels are organic and Fair Trade, whereas awareness of quality labels is very low.
- In her concluding remarks, the BEUC representative stressed the need to address the barriers to sustainable food consumption by transforming food environments to make healthy and sustainable food an easy and affordable choice for all consumers – and hence ensure that demand for sustainable food meets supply.

A presentation was made on the lessons learned related to socio-economic drivers and barriers **for environmentally sustainable farming** based **Horizon2020 funded projects – UNISECO and LIFT**.

- Apart from the need to address multiple sustainability challenges, the presenters drew attention **to the importance of governance**, that impacts the transition at a farm and territorial level. Policy making must consider sustainability at a farm, territory, landscape, and global level, consider that the scale and combination of specific practices deliver different synergies and trade-offs between productivity and other sustainability dimensions. It needs also to look at the system level to capture the interactions between the different elements of the food system.

A representative of the **EU Joint Research Center** presented **a farm typology based on farm level data**, to assess the transition towards environmentally friendly management strategies that helps move beyond the commonly used differentiation between conventional and organic farming. This typology has the potential to better describe the transition towards increasing self-sufficiency, circularity and decreasing environmental pressures.

- The categorisation shows that around 75% of the farms have low to medium performance in relation to key principles for sustainable farming.
- It shows a relatively low level of self-sufficiency of EU farms in terms of feed, energy, fertilization, and seeds which entails **a high vulnerability to shocks** especially price shocks.

Case studies were shown to exemplify how to enhance economic viability in the process of transition with **key enablers along the food supply chain**, such as creation of innovative knowledge networks, support from advisors, territorial governance approach, awareness at local administrative level of the importance of the use of local crops and breeds, the role of public procurement in providing market opportunities.

- It was stressed that policy support should be tailored in view of specific challenges and that further adoption of environmentally friendly practices require **a network and territorial approach with a stronger access to neutral advice**.
- The policy should focus on adjustments and targeting while approaching the food system as a whole and not only agriculture in isolation.

This input was followed by a presentation of lessons learned from research **on farmers' values and motivations** and their perception along the transition.

1.1. Exchange of views:

It was stressed that the increase of efficiency through decrease in farm labour has effects on jobs available in **rural areas and their vitality**.

- That there is a need to support farm models that provide additional value to rural communities.
- Design or change of CAP tools need to be based on better evaluation of current instruments and their effects in relation to the social and territorial effects.

There were different views on the extent to which EU farming should strive to increase **productivity**. Others referred to stagnating productivity growth as a problem. According to some organisations, enhanced conditionality entails significant new pressures on farmers in certain cases (rather than advantages).

Views were expressed that governance is key to ensure consistency regarding expectations towards sustainable practices at regional, national, and EU level.

Still, there is a need for **a common understanding and agreement on direction of travel for sustainability**, relevant pace, and instruments for transition for specific areas, specific farming systems and sectors.

- According to many, farming practices are mostly driven by market demand, and this is a defining factor for determining the pace and direction of transition.
- Adequate remuneration of farmers requires a fair transmission along the supply chain. It was felt that there are strong inequalities between farmers and regions, in terms of income but also of effects of environmental and climate related practices.
- Many asserted that **neutral advice** is a key enabler for farmers' engagement in testing and innovating further.
- Another element that was confirmed by many as important in the context of designing public support was **flexibility**- sustainable farming has different dimensions for different contexts.
- **Financing the transition** needs to be clearly articulated, with significant additional resources, according to participants in the future policy design. Appeals for both public and private sector resources were made in this context.
- Support should be designed for **adaptation to the local context at farm level** given the great heterogeneity across EU. General rules on support can be detrimental to context-based solutions, according to some.
- It was also stressed that **animal welfare** should be seen as integral part of sustainability.

According to many participants transition in agriculture **cannot be seen in isolation from the food system**. The revision of animal welfare legislation to meet consumer demands for higher animal welfare standards and finalising an **EU framework defining the sustainable food systems** were suggested among key tools to increase consumer demand for sustainable production. The lack of access to biological biocontrol was mentioned as one of the barriers faced by farmers who are willing to adopt more sustainable practices.

2. SESSION 2: ROLE OF CERTIFICATION IN SUPPORT OF TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Based on input provided by Krijn Poppe, economist and the representatives of Granlatte coop and IFOAM Organics Europe, participants reflected on certification as a tool to reduce administrative burdens and foster sustainability and to reward farmers for their sustainability performance by the food chain.

- It was noted that - in the context of a decreasing number of farms - the increased costs of the transition are not directly compensated in the food chain.
- Such compensation can be through the 'green' CAP payments or through the market. In both cases, 'certification' can be a tool to assess positive effort and outcomes on sustainability. There are many certification schemes in the industry and differentiation needs to be made between labelling and certification. There are also different degrees of certification and labelling, ranging from self-declaration, farm association approved, to third-party certifiers and public audit.
- Certification encourages private actors to build upon public themes and priorities.
- The experts argued that regardless of whether the support comes from public funding (through eco-schemes) or through the market, certification is a tool to assess sustainability. This tool is especially interesting considering the needed flexibility at farm level to address challenges in view of high regional and local heterogeneity (in addition to differences across Member States).
- It was underlined that the existing certification and labelling system for organic farming works well. It relies on ex ante assessments and ex post controls.
- The key challenge that requires examination is whether there is potential for aligning public and private initiatives that can alleviate administrative burden by using common key performance indicators (KPI), that focus on key common objectives, are auditable and can be standardised. It was argued that certification is a good audit tool to engage private actors to leverage the efforts. Such effort would also require better empirical data on environmental performance at farm level. Aligning methodology would possibly allow for same reporting from farmers to both public and private sectors.
- Additionally, it would need to be ensured that small and medium size farms and food companies have access to certification methodology and can afford third-party certification.

2.1. Exchange of views:

Participants had different views on the potential of certification as an option to streamline support for transition.

- Simplification could be possible if existing collective certification schemes are used for granting support under CAP eco-schemes or compliance with private collective certification is used as a proof of compliance with CAP requirements and payments. A

certification scheme that does not generate additional administrative burdens could be used within or be integrated into the CAP.

- Some argued there needs to be a link between certification and product labels targeting consumers. Alignment could be easier for single-issue labels (e.g. just for animal welfare).
- The idea of certification would be very good as a market initiative. It would allow extra revenue from the market needed for the transition. Public certification was considered difficult by some. It would lead to new general rules that are not adapted to the specific context in Member States and increase the risk of greenwashing. A public certification would create expectations of public funding, and this would move the focus and expectations from the market and supply chain actors.
- Also, affordability of certification can be an issue for small farmers. Challenges remain as well in the search for a shared understanding or definition of sustainable practices that considers specific farming systems, the social dimension and use of a framework that is adaptable to different contexts.

Day 2 - Friday, 16 February

3. SESSION 3 – CAP TOOLS FOR TRANSITION

Session 3 was dedicated to the exchange on design of CAP tools for transition, focusing on three topics – design of CAP tools for environmental and climate ambition, sustainable livestock management and opportunities for transition for soil management. Three framing presentations were delivered to stimulate group discussion.

CAP developments between productivity and sustainability objectives: Insights from OECD work– OECD representative presented the recent OECD review [Policies for the Future of Farming and Food in the European Union](#), including recommendations to integrate better environmental and climate objectives along with the ones for income and food security.

- The state of environmental resources calls for further re-design of current policy tools. The OECD review identifies a gap between policy ambitions on environmental sustainability and observable results. As example, cross compliance was challenging for monitoring and in terms of outcomes.
- OECD provided **recommendations** to enhance collective and result-based approaches for voluntary measures, and to rethink the role of direct payments to improve the productivity and sustainability performance of the European farming sector in the context of a food system approach. Further reforms should ensure a stronger connection between incentives and performance both for Member States and farmers. Another possible direction for reflection **may be a clearer separation between the income support for farms that demonstrate such needs and support for actions and results benefiting environment and climate.**
- The expert affirmed that CAP is not the only tool to address this gap but as the main tool to support the sustainability transition of the farming sector this policy should be better integrated with outcome-oriented regulations.
- More ideas were presented for reflection in relation to limiting required practices to those which are monitorable (for example through satellite images) while adopting a broader strategy to ensure effective voluntary measures.
- Territorially oriented approach may be needed to deal with specific environmental needs in a more effective way, by engaging with a broader range of actors.

- The speaker concluded with a call for thinking of the CAP more as an innovation policy that enables farmers to engage with suitable practices and invests more in skills, data gaps, monitoring and in advisory services.

A representative from **IDDRI** provided input on how to **reconcile agricultural and livestock practices with greater sustainability demands for the environment and for society**.

- The ecological and economic dimensions of livestock require tailored instruments that can only follow an agreed and societally supported vision of what transition is needed.
- From an ecological point of view, there is need to decrease feed and input dependency, to increase circularity and to manage landscapes and biodiversity. Increasing circularity would allow for valorising locally produced crops and would help to reduce protein dependency.
- From an economic point of view, it is important to consider variation across EU in terms of income, the capital concentration in certain sub sectors, high number of jobs in the livestock sector and the food affordability of animal products.
- Modelling has shown that there is a need to change market conditions to achieve several objectives at the same time and to identify compromises between them in the short run to start the transition. Tools must be preceded by a common vision, agreed on societal and food chain level of where and what transition is needed. Reaching this vision requires a dialogue space to think about compromises from a systemic and territorial point of view. Changes might be needed in volume, mix of products, ways animals are reared, industry locations, diets. None of these changes might occur fast and without a dialogue on the space for change and the necessary support.
- Physical realities should guide us as much as economic realities. But while physical realities cannot be pushed beyond a certain limit (and it is likely we have already reached the point), economic ones can be driven / changed by appropriate policy instruments that would change market conditions.

A representative of the ***European Alliance for Regenerative Agriculture (EARA)*** introduced the topic of sustainable soil management –opportunities for transition.

- He emphasised the need for better water and soil health management to achieve environmental objectives and increase below-ground living biomass. He provided more information on the practical application of soil biology in agriculture, in close exchange with soil science. Soil biodiversity is focal to achieve environmental goals and food security.
- Further details were provided to explain the principles of ‘regenerative agriculture’ as an approach to farming that uses soil conservation as the entry point to regenerate and contribute to multiple ecosystem services, conserve living biomass and stimulate photosynthesis, integrates several practices such as under-cropping, intercropping, grazing management, agroforestry.
- According to the speaker a gradual phase-in is needed: from slowly integrating cover crops, to crop rotation, and to reducing synthetic input. The transition costs would be very heterogeneous across MS and regions. There are examples of pioneering farmers achieving higher yields than neighbouring farmers who are farming in a conventional way.
- Attention must be given to greenwashing with variation of control systems from the private sector across suppliers.

- Key input for reflection included ideas for performance-based payments in CAP post-2027 that would allow for context-specific tools to guide farmers in choosing the sustainable practices that work best for them.

Exchange of views during group discussions reflected diversity of views and explored justification for them without aiming at consensus.

3.1. Group discussion 1: Scope and design of CAP in support of environment/climate actions

Uptake of voluntary tools:

- Many farmers are **ready to become involved** in ‘green’ interventions and are proud of acting for the benefit of the environment and climate.
- However, in some cases payments are **seen as not sufficiently attractive** – especially after falling in real terms because of inflation, and sometimes in nominal terms because of a more demanding baseline (conditionality) compared to the CAP before 2023.
- In respect of premia, some participants pointed to constraints of basing premia on **costs incurred and income foregone**. There were views that in many cases the premia levels are not adequate and disproportionate to the required effort – overcompensating or undercompensating. Others considered that premia based on costs incurred and income foregone were allowing schemes to be sufficiently attractive for farmers. The setting of the rate according to the targets (planned hectares) to be achieved under the intervention still was not fully understood by participants and would require some further explanations
- Some interventions are difficult to implement. This can be true of **results-based schemes**; nevertheless, these are feasible and various types are possible (including blends of practice-based and results-based payments).
- **Farmers operate in a different timeframe from intervention designers** – deciding relatively late whether to become involved, and deciding on basis of e.g. the premia offered, the intervention’s complexity, the risk of sanctions, and the yield sacrificed.
- Some farmers experience anxiety at the thought of non-compliance with the requirements of schemes (including conditionality), as this could have significant financial consequences
- Many agreed that greater **knowledge and provision of advice are needed** to boost scheme uptake.

Many participants pointed to the risks borne by farmers when starting and trying out **approaches which are new for them** and for their production system (including conversion to a new overall farming system – and not only conversion to organic farming in this case) and **emphasised a consequent need for financial support**. Greater knowledge among farmers and better provision of advice are prerequisites of innovation.

- Some participants thought that direct payments as they currently work are not delivering what they should, and that the **EU should move to a different overall configuration of CAP payments - centred primarily on payments for environmental public goods, but with an explicit and adequate income component** included in the premium, to reward farmers properly for their efforts.
- Other participants pointed to the importance of the current direct payments as a substantial part of farmers’ basic income and recalled that farmers absolutely need to make money.

- Some participants accepted the notion of direct payments but argued for **basing their value less on land area and more on employment – to overcome inequalities in payment distribution.**
- In case of a greater shift of funding to **payments for public goods**, some argued that it might make sense to move some GAEC standards to legislation. Others considered GAEC should be rewarded by voluntary ‘public goods’ schemes in such a scenario.
- Fundamental changes of the types discussed (which were not supported by all participants) **might have significant implications in terms of payment distribution between regions and sectors**, and for financial management, but these issues were not discussed in detail.

Even within the current CAP system, there is **room for better implementation.** Member States should have an incentive to design good environmental schemes, as they do not always use the flexibility of the CAP rules to the best effect (e.g., they do not always address problem hotspots from an environmental/climate perspective). In terms of premia, some participants took the view that the current rules of the CAP and the WTO Green Box allowed Member States to offer adequately generous payments. One participant underlined the past usefulness and reliability of payments under common market organisation programmes.

Perception of risks and ways to carry and distribute it:

- Some representatives of Member States administration commented that result-based payments increase uncertainty and are perceived as unpredictable from a point of view of budget management of the CAP. Other participants pointed to successful practices rewarding results that could be showcased.
- Administrative difficulties stem also from challenges to establish results and methods of measurements to which payments will be linked.
- The annual schemes does not allow to link to results as certain practices can yield results only after a longer period of application. Multi-annual contracts were perceived by some as a more stable rewarding mechanisms and by others as a source of rigidity in the management of the farm
- When setting the level of ambition for payments regional specificity and feasibility must be considered.
- The risk of failure needs to be factored in and accepted by the farmers and by the administrations.

3.2. Group discussion 2: Sustainability transition of livestock and the role of the CAP

The moderator introduced the objectives of the breakout session and reminded some of the questions sent in advance to the attendees, such as the perception of different stakeholders of key problems, threats and opportunities for the livestock sector, the identification of food systems aimed for and how far are we from having a political and social agreement on a common vision on the future of livestock.

The debate underscored the complexity of the livestock system and revealed divergent opinions among stakeholders and within the sector.

- Differentiating some systems as **primarily environmentally efficient and others as primarily productive** was a recurring theme shaped by varying perceptions, activities, and practices.
- Some stakeholders stressed the fact that the concept of **polarization** (i.e., organic/extensive perceived as good vs conventional that needs transformation) should not be emphasised and we do not need to move towards one or the other direction.

- Some see all livestock farming systems in evolution towards improved sustainability.
- **Extensive systems** are seen by some as models to aim for. But they are decreasing at high rates in certain areas, where more animals would be needed.
- Farmers' choices between extensive or intensive production systems, high tech (e.g. PLF) or low input husbandry systems, are driven by their particular situations and cannot be seen in isolation from market demands.
- Some argued that considering organic de-facto as resilient should be reconsidered, in view of use of resources, availability of forage, etc. Other considered organic farming or other forms of agro-ecology as matching their vision of sustainable systems.
- **Farm autonomy** is regarded as important for **adapting livestock to available resources and enhancing resilience** but there is a perceived risk of shifting from macroeconomic autonomy to microeconomic deficiency. **Circularity** (e.g. the flow of products, the use of food by- or co-products) helps, but farmer vulnerabilities must be assessed and considered by policy makers. **KPI for circularity should be developed or refined and tied to the capacity of the sectors to contribute to circularisation.** Safety considerations are paramount when transitioning to a circular economy.

Livestock is a major contributor to agricultural GHG emissions and environmental impact, which advocates for sustainable farming systems.

- Reductions in livestock numbers, especially in hot spot areas, were considered important by some participants. Others asked what steps livestock farmers should take in this regard and underlined any such change should be done gradually and with a proper transition.
- Demand for sustainable animal products (e.g., animal welfare, 'end the cage age') needs shifting habits (e.g., diet) and perceptions and ensure revenue for farmers. Some participants called for policies (e.g. FSFS) to support this process.
- Other participants expressed concern about reducing animal numbers, which is neither comfortable nor easy for farmers. The number of cattle, for example, is already decreasing rapidly, with positive effects on GHG emissions but detrimental effects in the form of loss of grassland, hedges, and biodiversity. Even more so in the case of small ruminants (sheep and goat), whose disappearance has negative consequences on landscape management in many mountainous areas of Europe.
- Other views invited considering livestock **delocalisation** to match land resources and highlighted the role of feed autonomy. Managing **biomass** effectively is essential given its diverse uses.

Consumers dissatisfaction with agriculture in general, **regardless of the type of livestock farming system** poses challenges for farmers according to some.

- Without consumer willingness to pay for quality products, farmers struggle to meet expectations. Farmers are required to follow certain rules and requirements, but it is difficult to reconcile **diverging challenges**.
- At the same time, consumers cannot be considered responsible for everything. The CAP is important to compensate farmers and not burden consumers. Some believe that farmers simply cannot continue with unsustainable practices.
- **Economic sustainability** is crucial for transition, and farmers are ready to follow **consumer demand** when there is a fair return. Some participants argued that farmers cannot bear the responsibility to produce for markets that do not exist.
- Consumer **prices** often do not reflect farmers' true costs according to some findings of a survey on consumer behaviour, and CAP subsidies may not target intended areas or systems enough. Many costs are borne by the society.

- **Diets** need to be addressed, as consumer demand is the most effective way to shift production systems. Diets shift slowly, however, and changes to – for example – more plant-based diets happen very gradually.
- .
- There was a consensus view that consumers are not sufficiently informed about how sustainability is evolving in farming systems, despite various **certifications and labels** that exist. In fact these labels may confuse them. Several participants underlined that the **food environment** determines consumer choice and called for policy initiatives in this area.

Sustainability: A major concern shared among all organisations is the lack of a universally accepted definition of **sustainability**, a term which is embedded in several models. This should be a priority.

- Coming to an agreed understanding of the sustainability concept is crucial, ensuring equal consideration of all three dimensions without solely focusing on environment, and considering various objectives including those under the LTVRA.
- Defining clear **criteria for measuring sustainability** is essential.

Given the diversity of models, it was also noted, the **CAP should address different challenges depending on different situations**. Many farmers **struggle to meet existing requirements, such as those outlined in nitrate and water framework directives, climate, etc., without seeing tangible returns**. It was suggested that CAP payments are more needed to meet legal requirements.

All organisations agreed that the CAP is one of the paths to support farmers in the **transition**.

- According to some, there is **clear gap between ambition and CAP implementation** and there is a need **to speed up the transition**, by reducing policy incoherence, having a food system approach, and increasing scientific evidence, in dialogue with farmers.
- As a first step, a strong **consensus on the transition** is needed among food system actors and stakeholders.
- The role of **public authorities** at national and EU level is important, based on strong **scientific evidence across disciplines**, including social science.

Involving the **civil society in dialogues** on future **livestock scenarios is important**, requiring a pragmatic European perspective not moved by emotions, and with the **strong involvement of farmers**. An example was given of the two-year dialogue between French farmers' and consumers' organizations **that led to a position paper**. Technical and financial support for farmers, co-designing with stakeholders, and implementing **market regulations** for fair prices to farmers are essential. **Impact assessments** accompanying transitions are also fundamental.

Ensuring **coherence and consistency between the CAP and trade policy** is crucial. Concerns about free trade agreements with other regions (e.g., Mercosur) was expressed. There is a perceived dichotomy between EU livestock farming and practices **outside Europe** where there are **less stringent requirements** (and production **standards**) leading to unfair competition. Some organisations advocate for halting imports that do not meet European standards for the benefit of farmers and consumers.

Socio-economic and environmental aspects need to be reconciled. CAP support for socio-economic transition should extend **beyond farm level**, and focus on rewarding small-medium size farms.

This support should encompass **territories**, including **ecosystems and people that take care of them especially in mountains or marginal areas**. The **labour aspect** also plays a role, as **livestock is the sector with the lowest level of generation renewal in agriculture**.

It was concluded that there is a need to find the right balance and make the best use of existing systems by identifying **instruments / policy measures for different types of transitions**. **Potential ‘losers’ should be identified, involved in the dialogue and compensated**.

3.3. Group discussion 3: Sustainable soil management – understanding what is behind regenerative ways of farming as an opportunity for transition. The role of the farmer. The role of the CAP.

Based on introductory input from **EARA** and input provided by **farmers personal experience** from **EARA** (‘regenerative’ farming) and from **Bioforum** (organic farming), participants exchanged on motivation and challenges from the farmers’ perspective of engaging in practices that preserve and enhance soil health, on expected outcomes of such practices alongside with tools for their verifiability. Discussion also focused on the relevance of CAP and market tools that can enable further sustainable soil management.

Drivers and barriers:

- It was clear from the farmer perspective that **motivation to engage** and move towards more sustainable practices comes from the need to respond to changing climate and soil conditions. Views were expressed that the farmer motivation grows with understanding of the biology of the soil, the importance of cover crops, of fungi, of bacteria for soil fertility and productivity and reducing erosion.
- The approach on the farm **has to be gradual, step by step** (*‘..change is a big number of small steps’*). Change of the soil like for example infiltration rate of the water, according to the regenerative farmer can already be seen in 3 to 5 years.
- This transition needs support from the buyers along the food supply chain and from **neutral advisors** that can accompany the experiment of changing practices. Advice should start to solve the problem with the aim of improving biodiversity, improving climate mitigation, not so much with the aim of promoting the use of a certain product to be applied. Access to **relevant and neutral advice** that is not part of marketing and product-oriented sale networks is lacking for many farmers and this is where **more public involvement and support may be needed, shifting knowledge base from chemistry to biology**.

There was an agreement among participants on the **need for flexibility for farmers to develop and use relevant beneficial practices** for soil with no strict and prescriptive definitions.

- It was mentioned that knowledge and innovation start at the farm, due to practices developed by farmers and then research follows to confirm its validity, which explains the importance of **room for experiments by farmers**.
- Successful and pioneer farmers active in embracing agroecological, regenerative and organic farming practices, mainly **learn via farmers’ networks**.
- Lack of alternatives for plant protection products and the **lengthy authorisation process of bio controls** was mentioned as another barrier.
- Financial risk may be a barrier to changing practices with farmers needing financial support for risk management for example when transforming rotations. It was underlined that farmers need financial buffers to be able to experiment with more sustainable practices.

- Barriers can be **yield and price variability**, **psychological ones** to adopting certain practices when farmers are accustomed to standard crop-rotation systems or are risk averse, **technological barriers** such as lack of crop variety and logistical ones such as small-scale production or geographically isolated production.

Indicators and tools for performance: Participants discussed what could be relevant indicators and tools that can be verifiable and can be linked to policy support funding.

- A relevant indicator for soil fertility remains the organic matter of the soil but this needs to be monitored at a farm level over longer periods.
- Performance must be seen in the context of specific pedoclimatic conditions, thus comparison between farmers who work with different types of soil is not relevant. In this respect the work of **soil districts** was mentioned as a good example for defining boundaries within which performance can be compared.
- Further work is needed to define what changes can be monitored for **result-based payments** on an annual and on a longer-term basis. According to some representatives of farming organisations (COPA), support based on practice adoption continues to be relevant with the need for science and research to confirm the impact on the environment and the economy. Other approaches based on results may complicate monitoring and reporting.
- The difference in resource investment in science and research and in the capacity of the advisory network in the various Member States also has to be considered.

Representatives of the agrifood supply chain (retailers) expressed a need to have a shared understanding with policy makers on the expectations towards farmers so that there is more alignment with the support and requirements suppliers provide to producers. It is important to incentivize and de-risk from the first step that farmers should take.

There were **different views on the need to have an EU level definition of regenerative agriculture**.

- There were views that an EU definition can help avoid polarisation and circumvent greenwashing.
- According to others, more definitions risk to decrease the flexibility needed to respond to diverse farming conditions.

The representatives of the farming community that is actively engaging in practices that preserve soil underlined that regenerative ways of farming reconcile sustainability from an environmental point of view and productivity and that productivity in this way can be at times rather more guaranteed than lost.

4. SESSION 4: SHARING RESULTS OF THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS.

Based on reporting from the work of the different groups, participants shared final reflections on policy implications, objectives, and tools for delivery.

- It was stressed again that there is a need for **a financial risk buffer** to allow farmers to innovate and transition, knowledge and incentives for ‘greener’ practices should be **easily available to farmers**.
- **Awareness** of the benefits that a change of practices can bring should be the main driver to engage and not fines. Farm advisory services should be more relevant and accessible to help farmers in transition with a step-by-step approach.

- According to some, **productivity increase** should not be the aim of all farming in Europe. Losses in outputs should not compromise profitability necessarily. Decreasing the level of input can help for the economic viability too. Efforts for environmental sustainability can result in better efficiency and in better yield and this message that comes from farmers' testimonials must reach other farmers. There is a perception that sustainability always comes at the price of productivity - regenerative or agroecological practices are taken up in countries with lower access to inputs to increase productivity. In some cases, high productivity cannot be seen in isolation; non-productive functions to allow for regeneration of soil fertility is an integral part of regenerative farming, for example.
- Representatives of several organisations insisted that European farming needs to remain steadily on the path of ensuring and **increasing productivity** in diverse sectors.
- Support systems should be **result-oriented** where science and technology for monitoring already allows. This would leave farmers space and flexibility to innovate and apply practices that regenerate soil biology and health in a way that is most adapted to their context. There was a consensus among participants that **soil health** is of paramount importance and reliance on fossil fuel-based resources should be reduced.
- **Circularity** should be the heart of farming systems. Policy that is oriented to the demand side remains important (to reduce food waste and influence diets). A common concept of sustainability along the food chain is needed that could help markets shift and make consumers more aware. Biomass availability should be the main driver of our reflection in the next few years, as we already know there won't be enough biomass to do all the things we want to do. As the first consumer of biomass, the livestock sector, is particularly key to be considered in that conversation.
- **A clear direction of travel and a common vision** of what we mean by sustainability is needed- this is important also for consumers awareness. This is also important for key sectors. Creating and agreeing on such vision requires space for dialogues and compromises. Any pathways for transition need build upon existing systems and envisage a gradual approach. Heterogeneity and diversity of farming needs to be recognized. The challenges for some to transition to more sustainable models or different farming models and different territories, are different. Farm production models should not be seen in opposition. Policy should focus on **identifying differentiated policy tools in views of different challenges** they face.
- It is difficult to have a "solution" that responds to all economic and environmental challenges at the same time. Policy needs to identify the needed **trade-offs**, and 'winners' and 'losers' of any transition path, to be able to find best ways to compensate and accompany **those impacted negatively and reduce the costs of the transition** for them.
- The age structure of European farming also should be considered. **The role of the farmer** in managing specific challenges of the farm needs to be central with policy enabling decisions, **entrepreneurship, and innovation**.

The format of the workshop, allowing for a dialogue, and the quality of the input provided, was highly appreciated by participants.

List of participants – see attached.

Catherine GESLAIN-LANEELLE, DG AGRI Directorate A

List of participants– Minutes

**TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON SUSTAINABILITY
JOINT MEETING WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE CIVIL DIALOG GROUP ON
CAP STRATEGIC PLANS AND HORIZONTAL MATTERS AND
THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE CAP STRATEGIC PLANS REGULATION**

*from 14:00 on Thursday, 15 February to 13:00 on Friday, 16 February 2024
in Brussels (CCAB Room 2.D) and online, via the Interactio platform*

MEMBER STATE	MINISTRY OR ORGANISATION
AT	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management
BE	SPW
	Vlaamse Overheid - Agentschap Landbouw en Zeevisserij
	Vlaamse Overheid - Departement voor Landbouw en Visserij
	Vlaamse Overheid - Departement Landbouw en Visserij
BG	Ministry of Agriculture and Food
DE	Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten
	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL)
DK	Danish Agricultural Agency
EE	Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture
	Republic of Estonia Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture
EL	EL MANAGING AUTHORITY
	Ministry of Rural Development and Food
ES	MAPA
FI	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
FR	Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire
	Représentation permanente de la France auprès de l'Union européenne
HU	Ministry of Agriculture
	Ministry Of Agriculture - Hungary
	Paying Agency
IE	Bord Bia Ireland
	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
IT	Ministero dell'agricoltura, della sovranità alimentare e delle foreste
	Ministry of Agriculture - DISR II Office
LT	Ministry of Agriculture
LU	Ministry of agriculture

LV	Ministry of Agriculture
MT	Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency
	Food Systems, MAFA
NL	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
PL	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
PT	Office for Planning and Policies - Ministry of Agriculture
RO	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - Managing Authority for NRDP
SE	Swedish Board of Agriculture
SK	Ministry of agriculture and rural development of the SR

CDG ORGANISATIONS	
	Agroecology Europe
	Assemblée des Régions Européennes Fruitières Légumières et Horticoles
	Association des régions européennes des produits d'origine
	BirdLife Europe
	Confédération Européenne des Entrepreneurs de Travaux Techniques Agricoles
	Conseil Européen des Jeunes Agriculteurs / European Council of Young Farmers
	Eurogroup for Animals
	Euromontana
	European agri-cooperatives / General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives of the European Union
	European Agroforestry Federation
	European Alliance for Plant-based Foods
	European Confederation of Maize Producers
	European Coordination Via Campesina
	European Environmental Bureau
	European farmers /
	Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations of the European Union
	European Federation of Origin Wines
	European Federation of Rural Tourism
	European Feed Manufacturers Federation / Fédération européenne des fabricants d'aliments composés
	European Landowner's Organisation
	European Leader Association for Rural Development
	European Liaison Committee for the Agricultural and AGRI-Food Trade

European Public Health Alliance
European Rural Community Alliance
Fédération Européenne pour la Santé Animale et la Sécurité Sanitaire
FooddrinkEurope
Freshfel Europe
Friends of the Earth
International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association
International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements European Regional Group
ORIGINEU Organisation pour un réseau international d'indications géographiques
Rurality, Environment, Development
World Wide Fund for Nature

OBSERVERS
Committee of the Regions
European Economic and Social Committee

AD HOC EXPERTS		
Dr. Pierre-Marie	AUBERT	IDDRI (private capacity)
David	BALDOCK	IEEP (private capacity)
Dave	BUCHAN	Farmer, Bioforum (private capacity)
Simona	CASELLI	Granlatte (private capacity)
Lorenzo	CIMATTI	Granlatte
GéRaud	DUMONT DE CHASSART	Farmer, EARA (private capacity)
Simon	KRAEMER	European Alliances for Regenerative Agriculture (EARA)
Gaelle	LEDUC	LIFT project (private capacity)
Camille	PERRIN	BEUC
Krijn	POPPE	(private capacity)
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