

# Petition to the European Parliament

## Preserving and managing European farmland as our common wealth: A CSO Call for a sustainable and fair EU governance of farmland

**We, citizens, farmers' organisations, rural development organisations, civic movements in favour of local and sustainable agriculture, environmental organisations, and human rights organisations, are calling upon the European Parliament to adopt a position on sustainable and fair EU governance of agricultural land, and to call upon the European Commission to adapt existing regulations and policies and develop future ones so that they contribute to preserving and managing farmland as our common wealth.**

In a global context of rising tensions around agricultural land, European citizens, civil society organisations and political representatives need to acknowledge that Europe is also directly affected and to take action. Recent studies<sup>1</sup> have shown that there is a very real and urgent issue concerning the governance of land in Europe. Pressures currently imposed on land use and management directly affect our working and living conditions, our quality of life and solidarity between European citizens and with the rest of the world, as well as the next generations. They indeed translate in: environmental degradation of soil, biodiversity, water and air, as well as reduced capacity to mitigate climate change; inadequate access to healthy and quality food and negative impact on communities' food sovereignty in Europe and in the global South; and destruction of agricultural jobs, rural activities and economies, which could provide a living and offer a desirable trade to many EU residents.

The scale, depth and pace of the current wave of rising tensions around farmland gives reason for great concern about current and future enjoyment of human rights worldwide. European States have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and more especially the right to food of people living in Europe and abroad. A sustainable and fair EU governance of farmland is part of existing human rights obligations of European States and a way to ensure food sovereignty and the right to adequate food and nutrition.

### **1/ Farmland is the basis of food production, lasting ecosystems and lively rural areas.**

Farmland is a complex resource. It is all at once: an asset of private or public owners; the ground for a wide array of human activities (food, leisure); and, like water or air, an essential resource which is necessary to all as a source of food, water, and rich and balanced ecosystems. As the major component of EU territory, agricultural land is also a decisive factor shaping our landscapes and quality of life. As the physical basis of farmers' activities, it is an essential basis for job creation, local activities and lively rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Hands off the land coalition and European coordination Via campesina, "Land concentration, land grabbing and people's struggles in Europe" June 2013. Verzandvoort S, Rietra R., Hack M. "Pressures on Prime Agricultural land in Europe", Alterra, Wageningen UR, November 2009. European environment Agency, Agricultural ecosystems: 10 messages for 2010. Institute for European Environmental Policy, The provision of public goods through agriculture in the European Union, 2009.

## 2/ Tremendous pressures on European farmland:

There are four types of pressures currently surrounding agricultural land in Europe:

- **The destruction of agricultural land:** We have forgotten that agricultural land is a non-renewable resource, and are mindlessly destroying it at a fast pace, to make way for urban and infrastructure developments. A large part of these developments are taking place near urban areas, which are often the most fertile land. As was done with natural areas, we therefore need to start considering EU farmland as a precious and non-renewable resource to be preserved and protected.
- **The destruction of farmland ecosystems:** farming practices overall lead to the destruction of biodiversity, the pollution of water and air, the homogenisation of landscapes and the depletion of their very basis: soil fertility. Existing studies are particularly alarming and point to the need for a radical reorientation of agricultural models towards agro-ecology.
- **Land concentration:** For decades, the Common Agricultural Policy and national agricultural policies have predominantly encouraged the modernisation of European agriculture, in the shape of specialisation, mechanisation, intensification, and land consolidation. While, after the second world war, a major transformation was needed to increase food production, the corollary environmental damages as well as economic and social impacts in terms of jobs loss and the destruction of social and economic fabric in rural areas are increasingly recognised. Large to very large farms predominantly go hand in hand with limited employment; homogeneity of production; long-supply chains and disconnection from local consumers, suppliers and communities; and the absence of on-farm processing or other activities. The overall policy focus on large farms means that small to medium-scale farms –most of which are economically and environmentally sustainable – are lacking the necessary support (e.g. access to credit, grants, etc.). The latter also tend to be evicted in their access to land by the former, in the current context of mostly unregulated land markets. Finally, large to very large farms are more difficult to take over for new entrants.
- **Blockage of generational renewal and new entrants:** with most EU farmers above 55, the coming decade will see a massive change of hands of land and farms. Yet, the current functioning of land markets and the overall orientations of agricultural policies do not adequately encourage farm transfers and the establishment of new entrants. Frequent obstacles are the lack of technical and human support to transferors and future farmers, the burden of investment costs needed to get established, the lack of tenure security, etc. Small farmers, organic farmers and farmers engaging in “atypical” farming activities (direct marketing, high added value, future farmers who do not have a family background in agriculture) are faced with additional difficulties and lack of support. Yet, this generational renewal can be a unique opportunity to dramatically reorientate European agriculture towards ecological, economically and socially sustainable forms of farming.

To ensure the primacy of users, first of which farmers, and long-term social needs in the use and management of agricultural land, farmland needs to be addressed as a policy issue, on regional, national and European levels. Policy-makers must ensure that land is used in a way that fulfils long term social needs in terms of preservation of agricultural use of the land, local quality food production, conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, job creation, renewal of farming generations, balance between urban and rural territories and population, and landscape conservation.

## 3/ Impacted but ignored...: European farmland in the midst of EU policies

Most regulations and policies regulating agricultural land (land planning, tax law, environmental regulations, etc.) are within the competences of national states and local authorities. Yet, farmland is

directly or indirectly affected by a range of EU regulations and policies, notably in the following areas:

- Environment: renewable energy directive (2009/28/EC), nitrates directive (91/676/EEC), water framework directive (2000/60/EC), etc.
- Regional policy, mobility and transport: development of large transport and other infrastructures, social and territorial cohesion,
- Common agricultural policy: overall agricultural orientations, land use and its evolution, land prices, young farmers, high nature value, etc.

As we have celebrated the International Year of Family Farming and need to ensure its continuation, and as we are entering the International Year of Soils, it is important to recognise the major contribution and potential of small- to medium-scale family and peasant agriculture. Reorientating EU policies and regulations in favour of sustainable and fair access to land and agriculture could bring an essential contribution to the **Europe 2020** Strategy. It can most directly create employment and activity, contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as energy sustainability, and contribute to poverty reduction and social inclusion.

#### 4/ Our requests to the European Parliament

- To ensure that agricultural land does not remain a blind spot of European policies and regulations,
  - In application of a human rights-based approach,
  - And on the basis of the current legislative framework, its necessary continuous monitoring and the need to comply with the best international standards,
- We are therefore asking the European Parliament to:

\* Propose the Commission to jointly study and monitor the land situation, through the development of an observatory and statistical apparatus (land use, land concentration, land prices, tenancy regimes, soil fertility, spatial planning, etc.)

\* Review the impact of EU policies on land use and allocation, and assess the current status of the governance of land in the EU in the light of the Committee on Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests approved in 2012<sup>2</sup>. Promote the implementation of the Guidelines worldwide, including in Europe and recognise that their due implementation in Europe would build recognition to do so elsewhere. Engage with member states as well as farmers' organisations and other civil society organisations for doing this review with the aim to identify concrete measures to improve the governance of land tenure in the EU.

\* Assess the impact of CAP and national implementation measures on family/ small-scale farming since the early 1990s.

Furthermore, in order to duly ensure a sound implementation of the new CAP, at the service of the general interest of the Europeans for the years to come, we request the European Parliament, to:

\* Engage with the Commission in assessing the possibilities to further extend the restrictions on foreigners' capacity to buy and rent land existing in some of the EU-12 member states so as to enable these states to develop adequate regulations on large-scale land acquisitions.

\* Effectively promote family and small- to medium-scale agriculture as the cornerstone of EU agriculture<sup>3</sup>. Send a strong message for the Commission and member states to use all the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/family-farming/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/family-farming/index_en.htm)

possibilities of the new CAP to support family and small-scale farming. Educate the public about the benefits and value of family and small-scale farming.

\* Urge the Commission and member states to use all existing possibilities within the new CAP, as well as other EU policies (e.g. employment, cohesion, education and learning) to foster generational renewal and support prospective farmers. Make it a priority of the next CAP reform.

\* Call the Commission and member states to use all existing possibilities within the new CAP, as well as other EU policies (e.g. environment) to promote ecological farming practices, such as organic farming or extensive herding. Make it a priority of the next CAP reform.

Finally, in view of the necessary developments for a necessary further enhancement of the CAP for the next period, we suggest to engage the necessary policy changes, and namely the following legislative developments, to ensure the right to food and fair and sustainable land tenure:

\* Support the adoption of an ambitious communication and strategy on “land as a resource”, which takes due account of the need to ensure access to land for sustainable farming.

\* Put forward a Directive on fair and sustainable access to farmland.

## SIGNATURES

### **Promoters:**

European Confederation Via Campesina, Europe

Terre de liens, France

Italian Association for Organic Farming (Associazione Nazionale per l’Agricoltura Biologica- AIAB), Italy

Regionalwert AG, Germany

### **Further signatories:**

ActionAid international

aGter, international

ARC2020, international

CEEweb for Biodiversity, international

Demeter international, international

European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers (FEBEA), Europe

Friends of the Earth Europe

Groupe de Bruges, Europe

IFOAM EU, Europe

Slow Food, international

Transnational institute, international

Urgenci, international

WWF European Policy Office, Europe

Amis de la Terre, France

Asociación Mandoibai de Etxarri-Aranatz, Spain

Asociacion para la custodia del territorio y el desarrollo sostenible (ACUDE), Spain

Bio Consom'acteurs, France

Biodynamic Land Trust, UK  
Bioforum, Belgium  
Bionekazaritza, organic farming organisation of the Basque country, Spain  
Bündnis junge Landwirtschaft (BjL), Germany  
Centro Internazionale Crocevia, Italy  
Col.lectiu l'Esquella, Spain  
Centro de Estudios Rurales y de Agricultura Internacional (CERAI), Spain  
Confédération paysanne, France  
Coop57, Spain  
Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG), Spain  
Coordination GASAP/ SEGAL, Belgium  
De Landgenoten, Belgium  
Development Agency of Sakana County, Spain  
Die Agronauten, Germany  
EcoRuralis, Romania  
EHNE-Bizkaia, Spain  
Escola de Pastors de Catalunya, Spain  
Federación de Comités de Solidaridad con el África Negra UMOYA, Spain  
Fédération des Associations pour le développement de l'emploi agricole et rural (FADEAR), France  
Fédération des Parcs naturels régionaux (FN PNR), France  
Fédération Nationale des Centres d'Initiatives pour Valoriser l'Agriculture et le Milieu Rural (FN CIVAM), France  
Federazione nazionale Pro Natura, Italy  
Fédération unie de groupements d'éleveurs et d'agriculteurs (FUGEA), Belgique  
FIAN Austria  
FIAN Belgium  
FIAN France  
FIAN Germany  
FIAN Netherlands  
FIAN Sweden  
Graèllsia, Grup d'Estudis i Comunicació Ambiental, Catalonia, Spain  
Grup de defensa del Ter, Spain  
Junge Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (jAbL), Germany  
La Nef, France  
Legambiente, Italy  
Llavors Orientals, Catalonia, Spain  
Mouvement d'action paysanne (MAP), Belgium  
Mouvement interrégional des AMAP (MIRAMAP), France  
Nature et Progrès, France  
Nourish Scotland, UK  
Oxfam France, France  
Oxfam-in-Belgium, Belgium  
Real Farming Trust, UK

Scottish Crofting Federation, UK  
Sindicato de Obreros del Campo, Spain  
Sindicato Labrego Galego, Spain  
Sociedad Española de Ornitología- SEO Birdlife, Spain  
Soil Association, UK  
SolaWi (German CSA network), Germany  
Terra franca, Spain  
Terre-en-vue, Belgium  
TerreNuove, Italy  
Xarxa de custodia del territori, Spain