Open letter: Civil Society alarmed by the prospect of regressive Common Agricultural Policy reform

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We are writing to you to address the way the current reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been managed by the European Parliament’s Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI).

The future of European agricultural and food policies is a societal issue that concerns us all. The majority of AGRI MEPs have ignored citizens’ calls and have failed to ensure that their concerns are fairly represented. This comes as a major disappointment to European citizens who had hoped that increased power to the European Parliament would close, rather than increase, the democratic gap the EU is facing.

The CAP is in crisis: the bulk of its considerable budget is distributed unfairly between farmers, with no clear policy objective in mind, while only small amounts support sustainable farming and rural areas. Instead, subsidies have driven, and continue to support, unhealthy and environmentally damaging approaches to farming and land management, poor animal welfare conditions and hindering the development of agriculture in developing countries. The public has repeatedly voiced these concerns but so far they have largely been ignored (a 2011 Eurobarometer shows that 77% of European citizens want more environmental conditionality attached to CAP subsidies).

Our organisations support the principle of public money for public goods in agriculture and rural development policy. This means public support must only be given to farmers in return for a healthy and vibrant countryside, and environmentally benign food production. Subsidies which negatively affect our environment, our health, jobs, developing countries and animal welfare should be abolished.

For the first time ever, MEPs have co-decision with Council to vote for change in agriculture policy. However, in January 2013, the Parliament’s AGRI Committee voted for a position that would de facto take the policy backwards.

Under the AGRI Committee’s vision for the CAP, money would continue to be unfairly distributed and support would be channelled to even the most polluting farming practices, with some farmers even paid twice for the same environmental practices (a principle going against the basic treaties of the EU). In essence, the AGRI Committee’s position goes against the environment, our health, jobs, animal welfare and developing countries. This also goes against the expressed opinions of the other committees in the European Parliament.

But you can change this! Up until now the debate has been controlled by a small group of MEPs defending vested interests in the larger AGRI Committee. In March, the full European Parliament will decide upon its final negotiating position and the opportunity to prevent a backwards and biased reform must be grasped with both hands.

The European Parliament has proven that it can change destructive policies for the better, most recently with the plenary vote on the Common Fisheries Policy’s Basic Regulation. Now is the time to do the same for the CAP.

We ask you, as public representatives, to act on behalf of real public interest when you vote on CAP reform in March, upholding the crucial role of the European Parliament.

Our organisations are at your disposal to help in reaching constructive solutions.
European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
European Public Health Alliance
CEE Bankwatch Network

Compassion in world farming
Transport & Environment
Fundación Quebrantahuesos

Four Paws
Natuurpunt
Aves

Natagora
Oeuvre d’Assistance aux Bêtes d’Abattoirs
UGT FITAG Industria y Trabajadores Agrarios

Legambiente
BirdWatchIreland
Vogelbescherming Nederland

Nabu
Finnish Federation for Animal Welfare Associations
Asociación Nacional para la Defensa de los Animales
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Media advisory:

More than 270 civil society organizations call for a CAP reform that supports sustainable farming and rural areas - not business as usual

Brussels, Wednesday 28 February 2013 Today an open letter signed by over 270 organisations from across Europe was sent to all Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)[1]. The letter voices Civil Society’s concerns on the current reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and how it has been poorly managed by the European Parliament’s Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (AGRI Committee), in the lead up to the plenary vote planned on 13 March.

The vote on 13 March is crucial as it now gives all MEPs, for the first time, the power and opportunity to cast their ballot on the CAP, which makes up 40% of the EU budget [2]. The AGRI Committee failed to make forward-looking decisions that would improve the long-term viability of farming, address economic and social problems in our rural communities and safeguard food security. If this position were to be confirmed, money would continue to flow to subsidies which negatively affect our environment, jobs, good farming practices, our health, developing countries and animal welfare [3].

The signatories represent more than 270 organisations: from farming to animal welfare, environment, church, development and health organisations, and utilities [4]. These organisations all call for the public interest to be genuinely taken into account when voting on the CAP reform in March. The European Parliament has already proven that it can make the right choices for the environment, society and the green economy, most recently with the plenary vote on the Common Fisheries Policy’s Basic Regulation.

For BirdLife Europe, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the IFOAM EU Group and WWF, turning this policy around would mean that MEPs vote for change in the following way:

“More than 270 civil society organisations in Europe, representing tens of millions of citizens, are not to be ignored. The AGRI Committee vote only reflected vested interests and not the public interest.” Faustine Defossez, EEB agriculture policy officer said. “Members of the European Parliament should not disregard the citizens’ call but should instead vote in Plenary for a greening, which includes compulsory measures for all farmers who receive subsidies, and ensure that our money is used for the common good.” She added.

Sébastien Godinot, Economist at WWF European Policy Office states: “The European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has voted through a proposal to pay farmers twice for exactly the same environmental measure. This is one of the measures the Plenary must oppose. Not only is it illegal under EU law, but it could result in billions of euros a year taken from environment programmes that are already suffering from budgets cuts. The loss will be directly felt as farming will carry on with a business as usual attitude while squandering chances to tackle problems like climate change and the loss of biodiversity.”

“It is astonishing to see that a majority of the members in the AGRI Committee do not share the view that you should respect European legislation when receiving subsidies,” states Trees Robijns, EU Agriculture and Bioenergy Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe. “NGOs from across Europe feel that this type of behaviour cannot continue. We need to see the European Parliament turn this around and make everybody equally respectful of the law.”

“The AGRI Committee has chosen to place a disproportionate emphasis on costly income stabilization insurance schemes that encourage risk taking and only benefit insurance companies. Instead comprehensive sustainable farming approaches need to be clearly embedded in Pillar 2, building on strong greening requirements in Pillar 1” said Stephen Meredith, IFOAM EU Group Policy Coordinator. “MEPs must shift the CAP towards greater ecological, economic and social sustainability by prioritising environmental investments and social and economic improvements. To push for change, thematic sub-programmes for HNV and organic farming need to be established, as they both bring together support from all rural development measures.”

- END -
Contact

Trees Robijns, BirdLife Europe: trees.robijns@birdlife.org, tel: +32 (0)2 2385091, mobile: +32 (0)478 887302
Faustine Defossez, EEB: faustine.defossez@eeb.org, tel: +32 (0)2 7908814, mobile: +32 (0)487 244270
Tycho Vandermaesen, WWF: tvandermaesen@wwf.eu, tel: +32 (0)2 7438808, mobile: +32 (0)498 725641
Stephen Meredith, IFOAM EU Group: stephen.meredith@ifoam-eu.org, tel: +32 (0)2 734 21 71

Notes to the editor:

[1] Link to the open letter in French, German and English

[2] For the first time, the Common Agricultural Policy is decided through co-decision process.

[3] If you would like to get more information, take a look at the following Infosheet on the CAP

[4] The 276 signatories are:

11.11.11.
Acção, Liberdade, Desenvolvimento, Educação, Investigação, Ambiente
IDEA
Acció Ecologista Agro
Acciónatura
Agir pour l’Environnement
AIAB
Aliadas Por La Soberanía Alimentaria
Alka Wildeife
Alliance of Associations Polish Green Network
Amigos de la Tierra España
Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
An Taisce – the National Trust for Ireland
Animal Action Greece
APS Aqua Crisius Oradea
Arc 2020
Arche Noah
Asociación Acima. Comunicación e Información Medioambiental
Asociación Concejo de la Mesta
Asociación Cultural Caldero Mágico
Asociación de Agricultura y Ganadería Ecológica “La Tanganilla”
Asociación de Consumidores Ecológicos La Tierrallana
Asociación Forestales de España
Asociación de Pastores/as La Gaiata
Asociación Defensa de la Cultura y la Naturaleza (ADECUNA)
Asociación Fotografía Y Biodiversidad
Asociación Galega de Custodia del Territorio
Asociación Geográfica Ambiental
Asociación La Raya
Asociación Montaña De Babia y Luna
Asociación Nacional para la Defensa de los Animales
Asociación para el Estudio y Mejora de los Salmónidos (AEMS-Rios Con Vida)
Asociación para la Recuperación del Bosque Autóctono (ARABA)
Asociación Pastores por el Monte Mediterráneo Asociación De Pastores/as La Gaiata
Asociación Silvema Serranía de Ronda
Asociación Territorios Vivos
Asociación Trashumancia y Naturaleza
Asociación Tudanca
Asociación Valor Ecológico
Asociatia Altitudine
Asociatia Centrul de Ecologie si Turism Maramures
Asociația Grupul de Inițiativă "Radu Anton Roman"
Asociația Salvatii Dunarea și Delta
Asociația Terra Ecologica
Asociația Tura in Natura Sibiu
Asociació Valenciana de Custòdia i Gestió Responsable del Territori
Association 4D
Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER)
Association of World Council of Churches related Development Organisations in Europe
Associazione per L’Agricoltura Biodinamica
Aves
Bat Conservation Trust
BirdLife Austria
BirdLife Cyprus
BirdLife Europe
BirdLife Finland
BirdLife Malta
BirdLife Slovenia
BirdWatchIreland
Bond Beter Leefmilieu
Buglife
Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
Bumblebee Conservation Trust
Butterfly Conservation Europe
Butterfly Conservation UK
Calla - Association for Preservation of the Environment
Campaign for Real Farming
Campaign to Protect Rural England
CEE Bankwatch Network
CEEweb for Biodiversity
Centre for Food Policy, City University London
Centre for sustainable alternatives
Centre for Transport and Energy
Centre of environmental and ethical education Živica
Centro Ibérico De Restauración Fluvial
Centrul pentru Resurse Civice
Centrum rozvoje Česká Skalice
Children of the Earth
Church of Sweden
CIVAM
Climate Action Network Europe
Clubul de Cicloturism 'NAPOCA'
Čmelák
Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO) Federación Agroalimentaria
Compassion in world farming
Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)
Conservatoire d’Espaces Naturels Languedoc-Roussillon
Convivium Amalur Gipuzkoa Donostia
Convivium Slow Food Valencia
Cooperativa Olivarera Los Pedroches
Czech Society for Ornithology
Danish Ecological Council
Danish Ornithological Society
DAPHNE CZ - Institute of Applied Ecology
Deutscher Naturschutzing
Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege e.V. (DVL)
Dierenartsen Zonder Grenzen
Dierenbescherming
Djurens Rätt
Dyrenes Beskyttelse
EATING CITY
EcEC
Eco Ruralis
Ecoinstitut
Ecologistas en Acción
EcoNexus
Ekologiska Lantbrukarna
Estonian Fund for Nature
Estonian Ornithological Society
Ethisch Verantwoord Alternatief
Eurogroup for Animals
Euronatur
Europarc Federation
European Community of Consumer Co-operatives
European Environmental Bureau
European Federation of National Associations of Water Services
European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
European Public Health Alliance
European Public Health and Agriculture Consortium
Federacion Andaluza de Consumidores y Productores Ecológicos
Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos El Ciudadano de Toledo
Federación Estatal de Pastores
Fédération Inter-Environnement Wallonie
Fédération Nationale d'Agriculture Biologique
Federation of Environmental Organizations of Cyprus
FIAN Belgium
Finnish Federation for Animal Welfare Associations
FIRAB
Focus Eco Center
Fondation Nicolas Hulot pour la nature et l’homme
Fondo Ambiente Italiano
Fondo Amigos del Buitre
FORO DE REDES Y ENTIDADES DE CUSTODIA DEL TERRITORIO – FRECT
Fondo para la Protección de los Animales Salvajes (FAPAS)
Food Matters
Forest Stewardship Council - Spain
Foro Asturias Sostenible
Four Paws
France Nature Environnement
Friends of the Earth Cyprus
Friends of the Earth England
Friends of the Earth Europe
Friends of the Earth- CEPA
Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo
Fundación Félix Rodríguez De La Fuente
Fundación Global Nature
Fundación Internacional para la Restauración de Ecosistemas
Fundación Migres
Fundación Oso Pardo
Fundación por una Nueva Cultura del Agua
Fundación Quebrantahuesos
Fundación Tormes-EB
Fundatia Adept
Garden Organic
Générations Futures
Glopolis
Greeninitiative Association
Greenpeace
Greenpeace Spain
Grupo de Acción para el Medio Ambiente (GRAMA)
Grupo de Rehabilitación de la Fauna Autóctona y de Su Hábitat, (GREFA)
Grupo Ornitológico Balear (GOB)
Red NCA Júcar
Health & environment Alliance
Hellenic Ornithological Society
HELLENIC RANGE AND PASTURE SOCIETY – HERPAS
Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Conservation Society
IFOAM EU Group
Instituto de Desarrollo Comunitario
International alliance of Catholic development agencies
Irish Doctors Environmental Association
Italia Nostra
La Fédération Nationale des Parcs Naturels Régionaux
Latvian Botanists Society
Latvian Ornithological Society
Le mouvement associatif de Terre de Liens
Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli
Legambiente
Les Amis de la Terre
Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux
Lithuanian Fund for Nature
Lithuanian Ornithological Society
Manos Unidas
MEDITERRANEAN SOS Network
Meine Landwirtschaft
Milieu Defensie
Mouvement Ecologique
Nabu
Natagora
National Trust
Natur & ëmwelt
Natur och Miljö r.f.
Nature friends International
Naturfreunde Deutschlands
Naturfreunde Österreich
Natuurmonumenten
Natuurpunt
Netwerk Bewust Verbruiken
New Economics Foundation
Northern Ireland Environment Link
Ocean
Oeuvre d’Assistance aux Bêtes d’Abattoirs
Ôkôburo
Organizatia ecologista Mare Nostrum
Oxfam
Oxfam Belgium
Pesticide Action Network Europe
Plantlife
Plataforma Contra la Especulación Urbanística y Ambiental de Candeleda
Plataforma de Toledo en Defensa del Tajo
Plataforma en Defensa de l’Ebre
Plataforma en Defensa de los Ríos Tajo y Alberche de Talavera de La Reina
Plataforma Jarama Vivo
Plataforma Salvemos el Henares
Polish Society for the Protection of Birds
PRO-BIO Association of organic farmers
Quercus - Associação Nacional de Conservação da Natureza
Raptor protection of Slovakia
Red Andaluza de Custodia del Territorio (Ínsulas)
Red Ciudadana por Una Nueva Cultura del Agua en el Tajo/Tejo y sus Ríos
Red de Semillas: Rensembrando e Intercambiando
Red Española de Desarrollo Rural
Red Montañas
Red por una Nueva Cultura del Agua del Júcar
Réseau agriculture durable
Réseau Cohérence
Risteco
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Salmon and Trout Association
Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife Slovakia
Slow Food
Slow Food Araba – Álava
Slow Food Gredos - Tiétar
Slow Food Madrid
Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica
Sociedad Española de Ornitología – SEO/BirdLife
Sociedade Galega de Ornitoloxía
Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves
SOCIETA' ITALIANA DI ECOLOGIA DEL PAESAGGIO
Societatea Carpatina Ardeleana – Satu Mare
Societatea Ornitologica Romana
SOS Perdiz Roja
Společnost pro zvířata
Suomen luonnonsuojeluliitto
Susila Dharma International Association
Sustainable Water Network
Swedish Ornithological Society
Swedish Society for Nature Conservation
Terra Cypria
Terra-1530
The Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU
The Mammal Society
The Permaculture Association
The Swedish Consumers' Association
The Wildlife Trust
Touring Club Italiano
Transport & Environment
TRENCA
UGT FITAG Industria y Trabajadores Agrarios
UK Food Group
Umwelt dachverband
Unión Internacional de Conservación de la Naturaleza – Comité Español UICN
Union Nacional de Asociaciones de Caza
UPBio - FederBio
Vereniging voor Ecologisch Leven en Tuinieren
Vogelbescherming Nederland
Voice Of Irish Concern for the Environment
Vredeseilanden
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
WWF
Xarsa de Custòdi del Territori
Xarsa per Una Nova Cultura de L’Aigua
Xarxa de l’Observatori del Deute en la Globalització (ODG)
Xúquer Viu
Young Friends of the Earth Europe
Za Zemiata
ZO CSOP JARO Jaromer