

A EUROPEAN FARMERS' DEAL - THE EPP VISION FOR AGRICULTURE IN EUROPE



The EPP is the party of European farmers and rural communities. We are with you and will defend your interests. You put high-quality and nutritious food on our tables. You produce to the highest standards in the world. You take care of nature and maintain vibrant communities in our rural areas, making them attractive places to live and work in. These are public goods that benefit everyone. The products you expertly produce, with unique know-how perfected over centuries, represent much more than just food. They are a major part of our common cultural heritage, firmly at the heart of our European identity, and we are admired for their excellence around the globe. You have delivered food security for the EU and beyond in the most trying circumstances. You have already made enormous efforts to produce sustainably, and you are committed to doing even better in the future. You rose to the challenge of producing throughout the pandemic and are doing so again under very testing conditions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We are grateful. We listen to your concerns because we are committed to maintaining a strong and resilient domestic agricultural sector. We condemn those who, on ideological grounds, blame you for destroying the environment. This discourages young farmers, in particular, from remaining in agriculture and threatens our food security. We cannot afford to rely on others for essential supplies, least of all, food. For the EPP, agriculture is a sector of strategic importance. We commit to working with you to ensure a European agricultural model that allows you to earn a fair living while working simultaneously towards improvements in terms of the environment, biodiversity, climate change and animal welfare, always mindful of the value of regional and local approaches.

Everyone wins from an agricultural sector that is sustainable from the economic, environmental and social perspectives. We focus on all three.

No farmers, no food: ensuring the economic and social prospects of EU farmers

There are currently around 9 million farms in the EU, with a labour force of around 17 million people. The food supply sector more broadly, with agriculture at its centre, accounts for around 8% of total EU employment. However, **farm income** lags considerably behind average wages in most Member States. Moreover, since 2005, the EU has lost around one-third of its farms, and the share of people employed in agriculture fell from 6.4 % of total EU employment in 2005 to 4.2 % in 2020. We are committed to halting this decline.

The EPP stands for a competitive European agricultural model based on **families** and professional farmers at the centre of **vibrant rural communities** across the EU. We recognise equally the importance of fostering diverse economic activities in our rural areas that contribute to the resilience of rural economies. We recognise that rural communities have an equal need for access to services as those living in urban centres, such as health, transport links and care services. We pay special attention to farmers' needs in areas facing natural constraints, such as mountainous, island and remote regions, Outermost Regions and depopulated areas because farming is often the main driver of economic development in those parts of Europe. We also pay special attention to the needs of

farmers in densely populated regions with a high degree of urbanisation where nature, economy, housing and agricultural activities are very much intertwined. We believe that different models of agriculture can coexist in the EU, and we stand for freedom of choice. There is huge diversity in farming models and agro-ecological principles that can be applied, and you should be able to choose according to the market, business orientation, agronomic challenges, agricultural traditions, profitability and costs.

We have consistently defended a strong, well-funded **Common Agricultural Policy** (CAP), and we will insist on a bigger CAP budget given the challenges you face. We are monitoring the implementation of the 2023-2027 CAP very closely to ensure that the national strategic plans deliver on the objectives we have set. We stand ready to hold the Commission and Member States to account if we see that the new system results in more - not less - complexity and bureaucracy, if there is less **fairness** in the distribution of support, and if the new conditionality regime and other environmental measures endanger farmers' ability to deliver food security. We will be vigilant in ensuring that the constitutional prerogatives of the EU's regions over agricultural policy are safeguarded and that farmers are treated equally across the Member States. We believe that CAP support distribution must be fair among and within Member States. Those elected in 2024 will decide the future CAP for the period after 2027. We are committed to making any improvements necessary that benefit you, ensuring a strong economic pillar that enables the transition to more sustainable farming practices that support generational renewal and protect you better in a highly volatile global market. We believe that farmers should be able to correct errors made in good faith before facing financial penalties, and we will insist that this right that we secured for you in the CAP is upheld.

We insist that efforts are stepped up to combat the alarming lack of **generational renewal** in agriculture, especially by making rural areas more attractive to the younger generation. Without young people willing to take up farming as a profession, the primary sector will die out, and economic life in rural areas will collapse. Only 11.9 % of EU farm managers were under the age of 40 in 2020. This is not sustainable. We will support all measures enabling young people to secure the sector's future by tackling the challenges of access to land

and finance, promoting advisory services, education and training, ensuring coherence between local, national and EU measures for young farmers, and through farm succession strategies. We support a stronger emphasis on apprenticeships in the agricultural sector, investment in training programmes at third level and facilitating a structured transition for young people into farming. We believe that the CAP budget should be increased for innovative young farmers. We support regional measures to make rural regions more attractive for people, young and old, to live in. We welcome the fact that the percentage of **women in agriculture** has increased, reaching 31.6% in 2020, but we must use the CAP and other tools to go further still. We recognise the vital role of women farmers in the rural economy. We support measures to make farming a more attractive career for women, developing appropriate business initiatives to encourage young women into farming. We insist that the Member States guarantee the social rights of all farmers and those employed in the sector. We strongly support a greater focus on farmers' mental well-being amid the complex challenges they face, including financial uncertainties, occupational risks and insufficient appreciation for their contribution to society.

We understand that a market-based agricultural policy can leave farmers exposed to the effects of **extreme price volatility**. The rapid influx of grain into the EU as a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine illustrates how quickly markets can be destabilised, especially in the countries bordering Ukraine, and we demand decisive action to restore market stability and compensate affected farmers. We pledge to do more to insulate you from the disastrous consequences of price volatility and will further improve price stability instruments in the future CAP. We fought hard to sharpen CAP tools and boost financial resources to deal with crises, offering enhanced risk management possibilities, strengthening the role of producer organisations and improving the structure of the food supply chain. The adoption of the first-ever directive to root out **unfair trading practices** in the food supply chain was an EPP success, and we will ensure that it delivers for you. You are not receiving a **fair price** for your products from the value chain, and this is scandalous. We demand a full-scale inquiry into this. You deserve a fair income, and we will continue our efforts to ensure that you get it. We stand for a level playing field for all EU farmers within the Single Market. We reject any attempt by large non-agricultural enterprises to set themselves up just to

exploit the CAP for financial benefit. This money belongs to active farmers: it belongs to you!

Forests and the entire forest-based value chain are a crucial part of rural areas. Forests provide jobs, ensure economic welfare, store carbon, offer health-benefits and combat desertification. The EPP believes the best know-how for sustainable forest management lies within the Member States; therefore, we respect the Member States' competence on forest-related legislation. We strongly support EU farmers and foresters at the heart of the **circular economy**, producing much-needed **renewable energy** and other bio-based materials, underlining that the increased use of wood in construction can turn buildings into carbon sinks. The development of **rural tourism**, including the concept of smart rural destinations, offers further opportunities for diversifying farm incomes and boosting rural areas, and we actively support it.

We defend traditional agro-pastoral farming and other outdoor livestock systems, recognising their role in biodiversity conservation and in maintaining agricultural activity across Europe. This is why we insist on the urgent need to ensure that farming and tourism remain possible in these areas in light of the challenges posed by a growing population of **large carnivores**. The problem of large carnivores must be solved without delay. It is time for a balanced approach to wildlife management, allowing flexibility at a regional level, and one in which reconsidering the protection status of wolves and bears is no longer taboo. In a broader sense, we must take steps to bridge the urban-rural divide by fostering a better mutual understanding of the challenges faced by those living in our towns and cities and those who live in the countryside. Encouraging urban agriculture and farmers' markets can serve as effective catalysts for this integration. We must invest in measures including communication strategies so that, from an early age, consumers understand and appreciate the efforts made by farmers to ensure there is sufficient, high-quality food for us to eat. We welcome the announcement by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen that a **strategic dialogue** with farmers is to be initiated, and we will ensure that your voice is heard.

The EPP supports an **open and rules-based trade policy**. However, we are clear: imported products must meet environmental, sanitary, phytosanitary, animal welfare

and social standards equivalent to those expected of our own producers. We will support all efforts to obtain international recognition for our standards and ensure reciprocity so that you are treated fairly. It makes no sense to decrease our productivity and shift production as well as climate impacts, such as carbon leakage and water scarcity, to third countries. Furthermore, we need to protect our production from the imposition of retaliatory tariffs for trade disputes originating in other sectors. EU trade agreements must include provisions to protect sensitive products. **Safeguard clauses** should be activated when surges in trade volumes threaten the stability of our market. Our excellent **Geographical Indications** must be protected in all trade agreements.

Innovation and investment, not ideology, as the driver of greener agriculture in the EU

Investment in and access to cutting edge **technology** is essential to keep European agriculture competitive on the global market, maintain our high standards and ensure sustainable production methods in line with society's expectations. Whether it's reducing GHG emissions, improving animal welfare or using less inputs, we believe that research and innovation will deliver better results than simply imposing top-down targets. We demand a renewed focus on agricultural **research and innovation** in all Member States, driven by the priorities of the Union, and considering regional dimensions. We must lower the environmental impact without necessarily reducing our agricultural production with the incorporation of cutting-edge technologies. Embracing precision agriculture and eco-friendly innovations will not only boost productivity but also minimise the environmental footprint. We demand far better and faster approval procedures for new techniques and alternatives. We need more investment in technology and infrastructure, in energy management systems, in accessible, reliable and fast internet in rural areas, and we must enhance interoperability, digital skills, digital innovation hubs, and develop new business and governance models. We will fight to increase the budget for the **Horizon** research programme dedicated to agriculture, food and the bioeconomy, and we stress the need to improve market access for smaller and new innovators. We must raise our game to ensure that know-how is swiftly transferred to farm level via

an improved **farm advisory system**. We will continue to promote decisively the use of Artificial Intelligence, big data, digitalisation and the use of European space technology to optimise land management. We will further develop promising initiatives such as **Smart Villages**.

We believe that **science-based** decision-making, enabling the use of new technology, offers far better pathways to a more sustainable agricultural sector than purely “ideological” approaches. Allowing the use of **New Breeding Techniques** (NBTs) in the EU, for example, will not only enable you as farmers to produce crops requiring less inputs, such as water, fertiliser and pesticides, but it will also mean RD&I investment and jobs across Europe. We will insist, nonetheless, that NBTs be compatible with current plant variety rights and patent law. We see great potential for farmers to diversify their incomes and deliver major environmental benefits through the rollout of voluntary, market-based **carbon farming** initiatives. We commit to ensuring that such schemes are set up with as little red tape as possible. We must increase our European **protein** production, both for food and feed. We believe in innovation and the necessary infrastructure for increased **circularity**, such as the use of **residual streams** and manure to produce on-farm renewable energy or to serve as a substitute for expensive chemical fertilisers. This is better for the soil and reduces the CO₂ emissions associated with fertiliser production.

We see the CAP as the main driver for delivering more innovative, competitive and sustainable agriculture in Europe. We have shown that we stand ready, if necessary, to throw out ill-considered legislative proposals that attempt to supersede the CAP, siphoning off its funds and placing new burdens on you without offering viable alternatives and compensation. The proposals on **nature restoration, pesticides** and **industrial emissions** are cases in point. Now is certainly not the time to put our food security at risk. On the contrary, we need to see a sustainable intensification of our production in order to guarantee food availability within the EU and beyond, especially at a time when Russia is threatening grain exports to the African continent and other vulnerable regions. We reject proposals that endanger your property rights and lack comprehensive impact assessments, especially in relation to farm viability and generational renewal. You should not be left alone to foot the bill for greater sustainability!

The EPP stands by farmers and the enormous efforts they have already made to increase **water** efficiency. We must provide further support to allow water to be used more sustainably. We consider new investments in water infrastructure and climate adaptation technologies to be essential for the future of the farming sector in those Member States more vulnerable to the effects of water scarcity and drought.

*We understand that you are confronted with the immense challenge of producing more and better in a very competitive globalised market, with less impact on the environment, but also suffering directly from the effects of climate change. We cannot expect you as farmers to do so much more with less support. We know that the market often does not reward the higher production costs arising from more sustainable practices. Ultimately, we would like to facilitate a **new consensus** within society. We want to see consumers really getting behind and supporting more sustainably-produced food and reflecting this in the choices they make in their local grocery stores.*