

YOUNG FARMERS' CALL FOR CLIMATE ACTION



**The European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)
December 2019**

OUR CALL FOR ACTION

As European young farmers, we are on the front line in the battle against climate change. This means that we are the first to feel its effects, a reality which many of us are experiencing today. The threat of climate change continues to grow, and young farmers realise the role we must play in ensuring a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector for the future. Climate action is urgent and necessary, but **measures must simultaneously recognise all the services which agriculture provides: socially, economically and environmentally.**

The United Nations has adopted 17 sustainable development goals to focus on towards 2030, each of them equally important to ensure that nobody is left behind. Young farmers realise that climate action should be done in consideration of, among others; ensuring quality of life and food security, a competitive European agriculture sector, and the protection of biodiversity and water resources.

Given that our livelihoods are so intertwined and dependent on climate, **we highlight in this document three key areas of climate action that young farmers are collectively prepared to address.** First, it is to secure our future by adapting to the changing climate. Secondly, it is to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from our production, which, like other activities, contributes to total global emissions. Thirdly, it is to sequester carbon while producing safe and healthy products for a growing population; an often-overlooked capacity of the agriculture sector.

In order to ensure that young farmers can step up to the plate and collectively deliver on these three actions: **a systems approach which addresses the already impeding obstacles that young farmers face is urgent.** With this document, CEJA and the young farmers we represent, will weigh in on a debate that is crucial for ensuring generational renewal, and ultimately, the survival of our sector.



ADAPTATION



Young farmer's livelihoods are extremely vulnerable to the threat of climate change. We have been raised during a time where unpredictable weather patterns and extremes were the norm. **Consequently, young farmers recognise that adapting to climate change is not an option, but a necessary management strategy.**

To achieve this, young farmers who are already faced with high risks need a strong palette of flexible instruments to prevent, react and adapt to weather and market fluctuations. We also recognise the need for knowledge, technology and innovation as well as new financial support measures to face the many challenges that will undoubtedly arise such as water scarcity, new pests and diseases, and frequent extreme weather conditions.

ON FARM PRACTICES: Improving soil quality and health will be key for farmers to improve their adaptability. Young farmers must be empowered to determine the practices best suited for their farm, through tailored farm-based research and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, such as Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) projects supported by the CAP. In order to support the uptake of these actions, CEJA believes that both short term Eco-Schemes and long term Agri-environmental climate commitments should be designed in a way that incentivises active farmers to adopt the necessary practices.

KNOWLEDGE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION: Climate change is an additional challenge our agriculture systems. For example, farmers will be faced with changing pests and disease patterns and emergences. In this regard CEJA supports the further research and development of integrated pest management techniques. In addition, the use of well-regulated new plant breeding techniques is another tool that on a case by case basis may be used to rapidly produce new drought-resistant and pest-resistant crops, whilst ensuring a diversity of available varieties is protected. New monitoring technologies also may provide more reliable and real time management recommendations based on weather, soil, animal and plant parameters. In order to maximise the output and implementation of these efforts, a well-designed Horizon Europe and

European Innovation Partnership (EIP) may ensure a multi-stakeholder approach is embedded in project proposals that provide opportunities for co-created and practical on farm experimentation.

INVESTMENT AID: It will be necessary to have investment support in order for young farmers to adopt new machinery and infrastructures to increase our resilience to drought, other weather extremes, and new pests and diseases. In order to ensure these actions are taken, CEJA asks for a combination of investment aid in the CAP and financial instruments, such as European Investment Bank group loans, which are outside of the realms of the CAP.

RISK MANAGEMENT: Climate change will make managing risks increasingly difficult, due to the associated inevitable weather extremes. Therefore, available and well-funded risk management tools may allow for a stable sector. These should be provided at the EU, national and regional level, and include specific funds for catastrophe and disaster. We call for a combination of private and public risk management tools, such as insurance schemes and mutualisation funds. On top of that, on farm diversification can be part of a strategy to allow farmers to manage their own risk.

European agriculture has always been characterised by its diversity. A diversity created by factors such as landscape, culture, policy and climate. As climate changes, the production systems that have been woven into the fabric of any region are subject to change as well. As young farmers, we realise that embracing this continuous change is a big part of our profession. However, in combination with the challenges we are already facing such as a structural shortage of income and inadequate access to land, we cannot face this evolution alone. Therefore, **CEJA asks for strongly funded transitional measures, such as education, trainings and investment support, that will allow farmers to adapt their production methods to new climatic conditions.**

Together with the millions of young people and civil society representatives who've been calling for strong climate action over the past months, young farmers feel that action must be taken.

However, it is not up to farmers alone to improve the sustainability of the agri-food sector. Production, processing distribution, and consumption of agri-food products, as in all sectors, have a task in reducing the agriculture sector's net contribution to climate change



In the next two chapters, we detail how our farming should not only reduce gross emissions, but also maximise our potential to sequester carbon in long term carbon sinks and short-term production cycles.

EMISSIONS REDUCTION

When it comes to lowering our emissions, young farmers want to continue on the efforts that generations of EU-farmers have made in the past decades. These efforts have led us to become global leaders in efficient agricultural production. We believe that further research, development, and implementation into areas such as precision agriculture, reducing emissions in livestock, and farm-based energy-production are crucial. On top of that, all efforts into increasing the circularity of our production at various levels should be fully supported. These efforts should result in a lower use of fossil-fuel based inputs in the whole supply chain.



THE LIVESTOCK SECTOR: In Europe, livestock have a role to play in ensuring a sustainable agriculture sector. Whether that be through grazing otherwise unusable lands, contributing to nutrient cycling, and upcycling inedible proteins into food products for human consumption. Many remote areas rely on livestock production as the sole economic activity because their land is not suitable for other types of production. Ruminants are the engines of circularity in agriculture systems, powering the rapid transformation of feed, back to plant-available nutrients.

Having said that, young farmers realise that emissions from the livestock sector are a significant proportion of our emissions and need to be reduced. These emissions are due to a combination of management practices and unavoidable natural processes. Some opportunities for improving productivity and reducing emissions include genetic selection of the herd, feed additives, improving manure management and animal housing infrastructure, and closing the nutrient cycle through better forage and grassland management. Research, knowledge-sharing, and innovation will be key in ensuring these practices are adopted throughout the EU.

ENERGY & BIO-ECONOMY: The EU agriculture sector has a large potential to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels, produce renewable energies to be used both on and off farm, and to provide primary renewable material for a broad range of industries. CEJA feels that increasing energy efficiency on farm through smart farming technologies, and recycling by-products such as

agriculture waste residues will provide ample opportunities to reduce farmer's reliance and consumption of fossil fuels. The production of bio-energy and bio-based materials for industrial processing should also be part of the EU strategy to reduce the sector's impact on climate change.

FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN & CONSUMERS: Young farmers realise that they are only one link in a long food chain. Therefore, any attempts to lower the carbon footprint will have to include measures from all of our partners, all the way from the producers of agricultural inputs to the consumer. Even though consumers are increasingly aware that they can have an impact with their choices and contribute to a sustainable food system, they have to take responsibility and make well-informed decisions. One way to empower them to do so is through clear labelling and more transparency along all the food chain. Strengthening the bargaining power of farmers, for example through short supply chains, may also provide consumers the assurance that farmers are receiving any added value. Finally, in the context of a growing population, efficiency gains should be demanded by society in addition to a strategy to tackle food loss and waste across the whole food chain.

TRADE: Even though, as young farmers, we recognise the global value of trade, we must also acknowledge the environmental, social, political, and economic impact of free trade agreements. We ask, therefore for European standards and the Paris agreements to be non-negotiable during trade negotiations. The governance of trade deals should aim at reducing emissions through energy efficiency or promoting the consumption of goods with a smaller carbon footprint. On top of that, the EU should aim to be self-sufficient in meeting their protein demands through an ambitious and flexible EU protein strategy.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

European agricultural soils can offer significant potential as carbon sinks, and thus lay the groundwork for young farmers to help reach climate goals. Through the sustainable management of carbon rich soils, sustainable forestry management, and innovative land management practices, farming and forestry are key actors in long-term removal of carbon from the atmosphere. To enable young farmers to play this role, they have to be supported with a variety of instruments each adjusted to their specific situation and these efforts should be recognised in the agricultural road to net neutrality.



FORESTRY: Certain management practices that maximises the growth potential of forestry, as well as afforestation and preventing deforestation is critical to sequestering carbon. Practices should always be coupled with an emphasis that diversity is maintained, if not enhanced. The continued use of forests as a renewable resource ensure that forests are taken care of and that sustainable measures can be implemented, and carbon storage increased. Measures should be viable in the long term and always science-based. Forests are very diverse and appropriate measures have to be determined from area to area, not on a one size fits all approach.

PEATLANDS & ORGANIC SOILS: Although peatlands and organic soils cover a small extent of the European Union, our land management practices of these soils can result in them being major carbon sinks, as opposed to sources of GHG emissions. Incentives to encourage the most sustainable management practices must be combined with long-term security for young farmers, who if they invest today in infrastructure tailored for particular practices and business-models, can be sure that they have security in the future.

LAND USE MANAGEMENT: A diversity of practices can encourage the increase of carbon sequestration in permanent and annual crop production. This may include incentivising reduce or

no-till practices, agroforestry, pastures, or maintenance of permanent landscape features. For this, it is necessary to have tailor made advice and solutions that reflect the soil and climatic conditions of the farm, as well as the socio-economic ones. On top of that, a more developed monitoring system, which accurately analyses farm-level carbon sequestration, could encourage farmers to take further steps in this. Land use management requires many long-term investments. Many young farmers across Europe are limited by their yearly land contracts and need the security of long terms leases for these investments to be economically feasible.

LAND USE CHANGE: All the potential that the agriculture sector has to store carbon, however, is threatened by the expansion of urban areas. Urbanisation and soil sealing is rarely considered as a threat to climate change, although it has a significant impact on the potential to sequester carbon. In addition, soil sealing is a threat to biodiversity and increases the risk of flooding and water scarcity. For young farmers urbanisation and sealing is another competitor for land, thus driving up the price of land.

CARBON FARMING TOOLS: Farmers should be recognised for the services they are providing to society, and fairly compensated. It is of paramount importance that dedicated public and private funds, independent of current agricultural subsidies, are put in place to reward farmers and foresters for the efforts, costs and loss in yield the adoption of the aforementioned practices may create. Such measures, besides Eco-Schemes and Agri-environmental climate commitments, that can do so include carbon farming schemes. Publicly organized, market-based carbon farming schemes may have an interesting role in allowing farmers to receive credit for their efforts in sequestering carbon.

LOOKING FORWARD

Climate change is a complex challenge we all face together. **Young farmers are dedicated to play their part, but we cannot do this alone!** In order to ensure a constructive and proactive debate, we need all stakeholders and policy-makers to consider our socio-economic boundaries and obstacles. For young farmers to be in a position in which they can achieve their full potential and adapt to climate change, reduce emissions, and sequester carbon, there must be measures to protect our future.



The need for financial stability and security to invest in long-term projects cannot be understated, as these are often overlooked obstacles for many young farmers, who are already in a vulnerable position.

Having said that, young farmers have a lot of hope. Consumers are increasingly more aware that they have an important role to play in ensuring a sustainable sector by supporting farmers to make the decisions they need to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Research institutions are increasingly incorporating farmers in the research designing processes, and testing technologies and innovations on field. Policy makers too, at various levels, are taking steps to do their part and have farmers at the table when drafting legislation. **As the debate unfolds, our voices need to be heard because it is young farmers who are implementing the necessary measures in the decades to come.**

We look to the horizon for a future European agriculture sector that is resilient and productive despite the oncoming and unimaginable challenges of climate change. This is a future where food security and farmers livelihoods are a given, alongside the protection of our environment, air and climate. Climate change requires ambitious world-wide action, where **everybody has a role to play and nobody is left behind.**