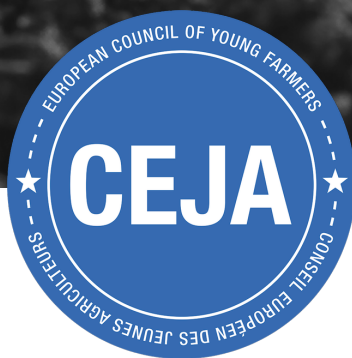




A future-proof foundation for

THE NEW GREEN ARCHITECTURE



THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF YOUNG FARMERS

2020

YOUNG FARMERS' CONDITIONS

European young farmers consider the New Green Architecture in the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as **a central enabling instrument for contributing to the overarching ambitions of the European Green Deal**. CEJA believes that the 9 specific objectives of the 2018 proposal from the European Commission offer the right framework to achieve this in the spirit of leaving nobody behind.

The elements of the New Green Architecture, enhanced conditionality, eco-schemes and agri-environmental climate measures (AECMs) have been rightfully identified as potential tools to achieve the targeted environmental objectives. While the New Delivery Model provides potential for a more targeted approach through the Strategic Plans, the EU must ensure that a level playing field remains as a core aspect of future European agriculture policy.



In addition, CEJA firmly stresses that there must **be a strong definition of active farmer** in order to ensure that all the tools within the CAP address the challenges of our generation. Any attempt to achieve a more sustainable sector through the CAP is doomed if there continues to be a risk that non-active farmers have access to the limited available funds.

Instruments for agri-environmental measures must also adhere to this definition. Failure to do so would not only transfer EU-funds away from intended beneficiaries, but also limit the potential for young farmers to do their part. With these conditions in mind, CEJA would like to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of achieving the many objectives through a simplified, yet tailored, New Green Architecture.



BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

The success of the New Green Architecture further hinges on the assurance of simplified administrative procedures budgetary flexibility, cross-cutting policy coherence, a level-playing field, and the continuous involvement of all relevant actors. The simplification of the CAP must remain a cornerstone by utilising new digitisation techniques, and streamlining reporting and accounting processes for farmers and managing authorities.

As budgets will undoubtedly be strained to combat the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the efficiency of measures and assurance that they are meeting their set objectives has never been more important. In that regard, **CEJA supports the possibility of transfers between pillars**, so long as the budget is only allocated to active farmers. Furthermore, if budgets are transferred they must be used to target the same objectives (i.e. one of the 9 objectives). For example, budget streams which are intended for economic or income support cannot be used to serve environmental objectives or vice-versa.

Budgetary flexibility should also encompass transfers between years so that unspent budgets (e.g. if new and experimental interventions have low uptake) can be rolled over into following years. Finally, any transfers should not lead to decreases in co-financing rates or overall budgetary ambition.

The EU should agree on an objective of 30% ring-fencing across both pillars for all environmental measures targeting active farmers. These must include innovative and critical tools for young farmers such as risk management and investment support. When the EU's environmental ambition extends beyond the budgetary framework of the CAP, other budget streams should be made available to incentivise further efforts. Funds must be allocated in such a way that assures the integrity of the common market, and is coherent with other European policies, in addition to complementing existing local, regional and national instruments.

Finally, young farmers and their associations, must be consulted during the design phase of the various elements at national and regional levels. Their participation, along with other relevant actors, is key to assuring the successful design of the New Green Architecture.



ENHANCED CONDITIONALITY

Young farmers are motivated to continue efforts related to mitigating and adapting to climate change, improving water quality and quantity, and improving soil and biodiversity. While enhanced conditionality has a role to play in achieving these objectives, it must be acknowledged that mandatory increases in standards may risk isolating farmers who would like to improve their practices, but are limited in options. Continuous increases in minimum standards for environmental protection is therefore not the most effective way to encourage best practices.

Voluntary measures, such as eco-schemes and AECMs must be the preferential approach. In addition, all efforts in maintaining or increasing environmental performance, also within the conditionality of the CAP, cannot disadvantage small farmers and should be acknowledged both publicly as well as financially, including through robust financing and training for agricultural, knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS).



Considering that Member States (MS) will have the flexibility to tailor each of the GAECs through the Strategic Plans, the European Commission's role of carefully scrutinizing each plan will be of vital importance as **MS will have to balance the precarious trade-off between coherence and flexibility** in order to secure that environmental and climate objectives are met while maintaining a level-playing field.



PERMANENT GRASSLANDS

Permanent grasslands play an important role in reaching environmental objectives. It is important that the diversity of grasslands and traditional farming character is taken into account when determining European-level definitions.

APPROPRIATE PROTECTION OF WETLANDS AND PEATLANDS

European agricultural soils can offer significant potential as carbon sinks. So, while CEJA supports this GAEC, it must be designed so that socio-economic trade-offs are carefully considered. Additionally, the investment in new business-models (e.g. paludiculture) must have long-term financial security, so that young farmers can confidently engage.

ESTABLISHMENT OF BUFFER STRIPS ALONG WATER COURSES

New technologies and innovative practices such as precision farming or use of leguminous cover crops should be considered when determining the minimum width of buffer strips on farms. Additionally, historical fragmentation of land must be taken into account as it results in more surface area along water courses.

BAN ON BURNING ARABLE-STUBBLE, EXCEPT FOR PLANT HEALTH REASONS

Young farmers agree with a ban on burning arable-stubble. Exceptions may be needed for regions where there is no viable alternative. Country-specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to soil functions must always be carefully weighed.

MANDATORY USE OF THE FARM SUSTAINABILITY TOOL

While the use of a farm sustainability tool for nutrient management is already a common practice by many farmers, its expansion is welcomed by CEJA as long as data protection is ensured, interfaces are intuitive, and the complexities of all farms are appropriately modeled.

PRESERVE THE SOIL POTENTIAL

Standards for best practices that promote healthy soil characteristics, such as crop rotation or diversification, are welcomed so long as farmers have the flexibility to choose what is best suited for their specific conditions. With crop rotation, there must be the option for multi-annual rotation, when relevant.

MINIMUM PERCENTAGE OF NON-PRODUCTIVE AREAS

The European Union should not prescribe a mandatory percentage related to non-productive areas greater than 5%, which includes those already existing. MS should be offered the flexibility to determine how to contribute to this European objective, according to their specific contexts, while ensuring a level-playing field.

ECO-SCHEMES

CEJA has been calling for more instruments that compensate farmers for the environmental services they provide for society, **so we welcome a broad range of voluntary and flexible country-specific eco-schemes**. As all Pillar 1 payments, there must be assurance that the funds distributed are actually for active farmers through a strong, improved and always mandatory definition. Failure to define active farmers within a hectare-based payment framework can only proliferate challenges to accessing land and land concentration.

When considering the framework for the eco-schemes, there are four parameters which CEJA encourages the European institutions to consider:

1 Farmers must be provided with a variety of instruments to do their part

First and foremost, the lessons learned from greening show us that farmers need to be provided with a diversity of options from which to choose the best instruments for their farm. With this in mind, the greater the options that are available, the more potential there is for uptake by farmers.

This diversity of instruments must, however, be balanced amongst Member States, and the Commission will have to play a strong coordinating role in ensuring that the eco-schemes are ambitious, exhaustive, and maintain a level-playing field.

In particular, specific measures are needed to invest **in innovative agroecological practices, precision farming and digitalisation** in order to support farmers towards a green transition.

2 Eco-schemes should be distributed with a results-based lump sum beyond costs incurred and income foregone

A combination of management- and results-based approach to eco-schemes could provide both administrative simplification, whilst reaching environmental ambition. Results-based approaches are evidenced to increase the adoption rates of agri-environmental schemes, thus improving the results and effectiveness of such measures.

CEJA believes that a results-based payments could be offered once results are reached, as an additional top-up to a management-based payment which covers costs incurred and income foregone. This would both motivate farmers to ensure objectives are actually reached, whilst compensating for the adoption of best practices. When objectives are not met, farmers should still be covered for their implementation efforts but would not receive the “result bonus”.

3 There must be incentives for farmers to adopt eco-schemes in a collaborative way

Collaborative adoption of practices between neighbouring groups of farmers provides multiple benefits, such as opportunities to exchange knowledge, technology and motivation. Additionally, certain environmental outcomes are only achieved when large enough areas are covered.

Thus, eco-schemes should be designed so that it is mandatory for Member States to offer incentives for collaborative adoption when relevant (e.g. objectives to improve biodiversity and water quality).

4 Duration of eco-schemes should be measure-dependent

Certain management practices are neither practical to implement on a yearly basis (due to the time effort and knowledge requirement), nor are they likely to deliver beneficial ecological results. It must be possible for Member States to offer particular eco-schemes on a multi-annual basis, if they are to reach their full potential.



AECMS AND PILLAR 2

The multi-year and voluntary framework of the agri-environmental measures (AECM) has provided many young farmers with opportunities to invest in practices on-farm that would otherwise be unattainable. Similar to the eco-schemes, the AECMs within the CAP post-2020 should only be for active farmers, provide incentives for collaborative action, as well as results-based lump-sums when relevant.

It is crucial that Member States be required to provide additional resources for training and advisory services, so that AKIS can be accessible for all and independent of commercial and other interests.

Advisory services must take a holistic approach and cover different topics such as: sustainable management of nutrients and chemical inputs, agro-ecological and agro-forestry practices and techniques, collaboration with producer organisations and farmer groups, assistance for farmers in transition due to changes in consumer demand, practices that improve resilience and adaptation to climate change, and sustainable and long-term business strategies.

CONCLUSION

Young farmers have been calling on decision-makers to provide the necessary enabling framework to ensure a sustainable and viable agricultural sector in Europe for generations to come. To contribute to this vision, the New Green Architecture must offer incentives for active farmers to uptake both technologically innovative and nature-inclusive agroecological tools and practices. It is the farmers of tomorrow who are best equipped to determine what tools they need, today

Therefore, young farmers must be part of the process of designing the various elements in the Strategic Plans in order to ensure that budgets spent achieve their target objectives. In the CAP post-2020, it will be crucial that any unnecessary administrative burden is avoided in order to increase the uptake potential.

It will be the voluntary measures in the New Green Architecture that will most effectively empower young farmers to do their part. Eco-schemes, as the new instrument in the New Green Architecture, have the potential to offer those opportunities, but **there must be a range of options, a combined result- and management-based approach, multi-annual duration when relevant, and incentives for collective applications.**

Agri-environmental measures have already proven to provide opportunities for farmers looking to experiment on-farm. Advisory services will play a key role in knowledge exchange, so their capacity must reflect the **diversity of knowledge requirements that farmers are seeking.** The success of these measures will ultimately hinge on the assurance of administrative simplification, an appropriately allocated budget, cross-cutting policy coherence, and the continuous involvement of all relevant actors, and especially that of the next generation of farmers.





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