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Dismantling environmental rules will hinder, not help farmers: Invest in their resilience

Joint statement on simplification packages affecting EU agriculture and food

The European Commission has announced the adoption of two simplification packages, one addressing the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), expected in April, and a second targeting environmental and food safety policies beyond the CAP, foreseen for the end of 2025. This comes just a year after the 'simplification' reform of the CAP, which already led to a significant weakening of its environmental rules. Unfortunately, the European Commission's claims that these changes will not affect the CAP's environmental and climate ambition have not been substantiated by any impact assessment or real data.

If the European Commission truly intends to act in the best interests of farmers and support them in tackling the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises, it is crucial that the upcoming revision of CAP rules strengthens, rather than weakens, the CAP legislative framework.

Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, shifting precipitation patterns, the collapse of biodiversity, and pollution are reducing yields and increasing risks to farmers' long-term ability to produce food. The first ever report by the [European Environmental Agency \(EEA\) assessing the climate risks in Europe](#), published last year, highlights that "heat stress and droughts already negatively affect European crop production compared to their yield potentials, especially in southern Europe, with wheat and maize yield reductions of over 60% in some southern European regions and up to 30% in other European regions, causing substantial economic damage. Excessive rainfall can also lead to crop failures". Furthermore, the recent [EEA report on the state of water](#) underlined that agriculture is the primary pressure on surface and groundwater, driven by water use and pollution from the intensive use of nutrients and pesticides. Meanwhile, up to 70% of EU soils are unhealthy, and biodiversity is collapsing at an unprecedented rate, jeopardising crucial ecosystem services, such as pollination, nutrient cycling, and natural pest control.

The CAP has done far too little to help farmers build resilience to face the triple planetary crisis and adapt to its immense challenges. By prioritising hectare-based income support, which largely benefits rich landowners, and continuing harmful subsidies for factory farming and excessive pesticide use, the CAP has too often hindered progress rather than facilitated it. As a result, the CAP has failed to effectively support farmers against extreme weather events, declining yields, unhealthy soils, economic instability, and dependence on external synthetic agricultural inputs.

In order to address the existential challenges we are facing, a 'simplification reform' of the CAP must also include legislative and non-legislative measures that strengthen farmers' resilience and

ensure the long-needed transition to sustainable practices. Such practices should build on nature-based solutions and support the reduction of GHG emissions and agro-chemical inputs.

In particular, the European Commission must:

- Increase the portion of direct payments allocated to eco-schemes to 30% in 2026-2027, thereby providing stronger incentives for climate and environmentally friendly farming practices. This is in line with the Vision's stated objective to move towards a more incentive-based approach, and with the unanimous recommendation by the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture that "financial support to environmental and climate actions will need to substantially increase annually".
- Not weaken further the EU legal framework for the remaining Good agricultural and environmental conditions (GAEC) standards. On the contrary, the implementation of GAECs and Statutory Management Requirements (SMR) at the national level should be strengthened to ensure that these achieve the desired outcomes, in line with the objectives of the CAP.
- Require Member states with a high proportion of drained organic soils used in agriculture to offer to farmers an eco-scheme or agri-environment-climate scheme that support the sustainable management of peatlands, peatland rewetting and paludiculture. This should complement the mandatory scheme for the establishment of landscape features, introduced as part of the 2024 reform. These schemes should also incorporate an incentive component in their premia to enhance their attractiveness to farmers. The implementation of land-management schemes should be supported by systemic and longer-term measures.¹
- Step up public and independent advisory support to help farmers adopt agro-ecological practices across Europe, enabling them to adapt to the increasing challenges posed by climate change, as well as the biodiversity and pollution crises.
- Tighten the rules for investment support to ensure it facilitates the transition to a sustainable farming system and contributes to building resilience.
- Link CAP payments to measurable outcomes, using robust indicators, to ensure that financial support contributes to practices that effectively address the triple environmental crisis, restore long-term resilience of farming, and enhance livability of rural areas.

When it comes to reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, the focus must be on harmonising reporting processes, enhancing the digitalisation of systems, and effectively communicating and clarifying the rules for proper implementation. Many of the challenges farmers face fall within the competence of national authorities and must be addressed at the national level. As highlighted in the Vision, the use of satellite data is an important element that could "reduce on-the-spot controls and reduce reporting obligations" leading to "better resource use, reduced input costs, and improved sustainability."

¹ Systemic measures including the promotion of plant-based building materials from paludiculture and the gradual phase-out of peat in favor of compost from hydrogenic biomass.

While there may be room to simplify annual performance reports, the undersigned strongly oppose their complete suspension. In a context of mounting pressure on public budgets, it is crucial to accurately monitor how funds are spent. The annual performance report helps ensure that CAP funds are aligned with CAP Strategic Plans, ensuring accountability and avoiding deviations that waste taxpayers' money and undermine the social acceptability of the CAP.

Weakening or removing processes and instruments designed to ensure the achievement of the CAP objectives is unacceptable and counterproductive to both farmers and the public. Maintaining these mechanisms and standards is essential to guarantee a level playing field for farmers across the EU, preventing further renationalisation of a policy that must remain European, with a set of common objectives. Dismantling the CAP's already weak green credentials further undermines the policy's legitimacy, raising doubts about its continuation in a context of scarce public funds.

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