



CONSEIL EUROPEEN DES JEUNES AGRICULTEURS

European Council of Young Farmers - Europäischer Rat der Junglandwirte

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**Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers
Under the Cypriot Presidency of the European Union**

Nicosia, Cyprus

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Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Dear President of the Farm Council, Minister Aletraris,
Dear Commissioner Ciołoş,
Dear Ministers of Agriculture,
Dear COMAGRI Chairman De Castro,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Presidency on highlighting what is perhaps the most substantial challenge for the future of food production in Europe: achieving an environmentally sustainable agricultural sector while meeting increasing global food demands. Both water scarcity and land abandonment are essential examples of obstacles we will need to overcome in future, while simultaneously attempting to feed a growing world population.

However, upon reading the note circulated by the Presidency prior to the Informal, I found myself disheartened. I am convinced many of the distinguished attendants have heard me touch upon the topic, but since there was no mention of it in the note, I feel urged to bring this important to point to your attention. In the Cypriot note there was no mention of young farmers or the need to increase generational renewal in European agriculture as potential solution to the challenges mentioned.

Dear Chairman, you state the need for “farmers to stay in place and to continue to produce the many public goods that society wants” – but a farmer cannot stay in place forever – especially when the average age of a European farmer is over 55.

Who will replace these farmers 10 years from now and how will we avoid the land abandonment implications?

Who will develop the “green technologies and practices” we need in order to produce food sustainably?

Are you expecting the third of European farmers *over* the age of 65 to meet the “productivity challenge” you speak of?

Dear Ministers, you should know the stats by now. I am sure I have repeatedly informed you: 6% of European farmers are under 35. We need to act now with this reform: 2020 will be too late – just as with the climate change challenge, “keeping the status quo is not an option”. The objectives of food security and climate change mitigation cannot be achieved without the assistance of the innovative, well-trained young agricultural entrepreneurs who are so eager to make their mark on the future. All these issues are inter-linked: in agriculture, environmental and economic sustainability simply cannot be achieved without demographic sustainability.

In a Europe where the main challenge to becoming a farmer is the access to land and when land is available, young farmers lack the access to credit to start a profitable business on that land. The fact that land abandonment is on the agenda here today is a clear sign of what is crucially missing in European agricultural policy at the moment.

In an effort to tackle this, the Commission has proposed measures for young farmers in its legislative proposals, including a mandatory annual top-up of direct payments to young farmers in the first five years of their business and a package for installation aid in Pillar II. The budget for this top up, which in our view should be at least 2% of the national envelope, is a proof of inter-generational solidarity. I call upon the Cypriot Presidency and the Council to support this mandatory policy tool for young farmers, as did Rapporteur Capoulas Santos for the European Parliament. This top up is acknowledgement of the scale of the problem and will help smoothen the first years after installation.

But in order to get started, young farmers first need to pass the farm gate. For this, we need a robust installation policy in second pillar of the CAP. We call on the Member States to allocate a minimum of 5% of the total co-financed EFRD budget to sub-programme for young farmers.

This set of measures will provide a clear political message to the future generation: that Europe believes in their ability to meet the challenges of increasing global food demands alongside decreasing natural resources and climate change concerns.

Ministers, if you want to:

Conserve scarce resources such as water;

Solve land abandonment concerns;

Meet increasing food demands;

Protect biodiversity;

Progress towards sustainable food production;

Preserve the vitality of rural areas; and

Be more competitive on the world market...

You need to support the younger generation.

Yes, we need greener agricultural production, and yes we need to ensure the efficient use of dwindling resources in future – but before we can do all that, we need to secure young people's access to the sector. It is the scarce resource of the next generation of European farmers which needs the most urgent protection.

I thank you again, Minister Aletraris, for inviting me to speak at this Informal Farm Council. Thank you all for your attention.