



EU Staff for Climate letter to leaders of EU Institutions: Greening the CAP

Brussels, 10 November 2020

Subject: Aligning the CAP with the European Green Deal

Dear President von der Leyen, dear Commissioner Wojciechowski,

The European Green Deal has set out to design a set of deeply transformative policies to steer our economies towards a healthier and more resilient future, and away from the current path, which risks catastrophic climate change and environmental degradation. Agriculture is one of the key factors in determining which of these scenarios will materialise, and the Green Deal has sought to protect and restore natural and agricultural ecosystems. To that end, the EU, under your leadership, and the Heads of Government have endorsed the [Leaders' Pledge for Nature](#), recognising – like the European Parliament has done – the planetary emergency we are in, and committing, for example, to transitioning to sustainable food systems and to shifting agricultural policies away from harmful subsidies. The European Parliament has declared a planetary emergency and the European Council has adopted conclusions declaring climate change an existential threat.

However, the proposed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), now with the Council and Parliament, is flagrantly at odds with the Green Deal and the Leaders' Pledge. The Commission's original proposal, although not as ambitious as many had wished, would at least not have prevented the Green Deal from being achieved under certain conditions.¹ We note that while the Council appears to have taken scant account of the Green Deal objectives, the Parliament's amendments are mixed, in some cases pushing for higher environmental standards than the Commission proposal. However, the positions of the other institutions have not met most of the relevant conditions. As a result, the original proposal risks being substantially compromised.

If the CAP is passed in anything like this form, it risks locking in agricultural policies which will accelerate biodiversity loss and, in the longer term, create food insecurity as well as having potentially broader economic implications in the medium and longer term.² Agriculture also makes a significant difference with regard to net greenhouse gas emissions³ and other environmental pollution, where the difference in impact between the types of agricultural models and practices⁴ should be fully taken into account by CAP support. It is our firm belief that, given the rapidly shifting political and social landscape and the accelerating climate and ecological crises, it is likely that key parts of the CAP as it is currently taking shape will be unthinkable already in a few years' time.

¹ Analysis of links between CAP Reform and Green Deal, SWD(2020) 93 final, 20.5.2020. Several earlier analyses have highlighted how the CAP has so far failed to contribute to key objectives of EU climate and environmental policy – for example the 2020 report from the European Court of Auditors, “Biodiversity on farmland: CAP contribution has not halted the decline”.

² See e.g. OECD (2019) Biodiversity: Finance and the Economic and Business Case for Action; IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (<https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>); International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (2020): COVID-19 and the crisis in food systems; IPBES workshop on Biodiversity and pandemics (2020) (<https://ipbes.net/pandemics>).

³ See e.g. a fresh report by scientists from top universities: Clark et al (2020) “Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change targets”, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/370/6517/705.full>.

⁴ See e.g. United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (2013) “Wake up before it's too late”, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditcted2012d3_en.pdf.

Even in the short term, implementing such a CAP would hamper the ability of the European institutions to achieve the Green Deal objectives. Many of us working on implementing aspects of the Green Deal and related policies feel frustration at those efforts being critically undermined by a weak policy inherited from the previous Commission and further diluted by the co-legislators. Consistency in the design and implementation of different EU policies is essential for their effectiveness, in line with the Treaties. Policy effectiveness also depends on a clear sense of purpose and direction among staff of the Institutions.

Given this, EU Staff for Climate advocates the following:

1. The Commission should work towards scheduling CAP discussions with Member States via COREPER instead of the Special Committee on Agriculture alone, including engaging with the Presidency of the Council, to ensure that the wider governmental goals and public good are appropriately taken into account.
2. During the trilogue stage with the Parliament and Council, the Commission should work towards:
 - a. defending those elements of the original proposal that have been identified as steppingstones towards achieving the Green Deal;
 - b. using the environmentally positive amendments made by the Parliament to help close the remaining gaps;
 - c. inserting a yearly or biennial review mechanism triggering a process leading to the revision of the CAP in line with the goals of Green Deal, should key performance indicators not be met.
3. If it turns out (or is expected) that such amendments cannot be achieved, the Commission should explore all possible options for withdrawing its proposal for the CAP reform, with the goal of revising it in line with the Green Deal before resubmitting it. There are many well-known ways in which a revised proposal could be used to design an agricultural policy more in line with the proclaimed climate and environmental objectives of all the EU institutions, in particular the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy. These include binding and appropriate climate and biodiversity targets for agricultural land, as also recommended by the Court of Auditors (see above). The time gained by the decision to continue the current CAP regime for the next two years could be used for this purpose. A transition period could also be envisaged in phasing out the old CAP, giving the rural backbone of Europe time to adjust gradually.

Putting agriculture on a more sustainable footing, which would ensure food security, fairness to farmers and meeting the planetary boundaries, can be done. What it requires is political will, engagement for popular support and operationalisation. We are committed to supporting you in pushing the implementation of the Green Deal to a level of ambition that matches this enormous challenge.

Yours faithfully,

EU Staff for Climate

Cc: Executive Vice President Frans Timmermans, Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius, President of the European Council Charles Michel, President of the European Parliament David Sassoli