

The process behind the CAP 2013 dialogue

The current CAP and its associated financing are set until 2013. However, the discussion about a renewed CAP from 2013 is already fully under way. Because the CAP affects the interests of agriculturalists and horticulturalists in the North and South as well as people and consumers, a wide social debate between different organisations in civil society is required.

This European symposium on the theme 'A Future for a Strong Common Agricultural Policy' originated as a result of cooperation between two consultation platforms of organisations from civil society on the Flemish and Walloon side. It is a key moment in a process of consultation between farmers, North-South and environmental organisations on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union.

Dialogue originated between different social parties (farmers', environmental and North-South organisations) in both the Flemish and Walloon region. The common positions were further elaborated in a broadly supported vision document in both parts of the country.

On the Flemish side VODO, an association of NGOs working together on sustainable development, entered into dialogue with Boerenbond (farmers' union). This process resulted in a consensus text on the objectives of a sustainable European Agricultural Policy. The accent lies on sustainable food production, focusing on the balance between the economic, social and ecological dimensions. The organisations argue that regional food production is the best guarantee for food security.

In the Walloon Region, the Plate-forme Souveraineté Alimentaire (PFSA) unites farmers, consumers and environmental and North-South organisations around the theme of food sovereignty. The shared standpoints concerning the CAP resulted in a joint vision document in which the objectives and a number of instruments for a stronger European Agricultural Policy are explained.

With this symposium we are looking towards domestic and foreign policy makers and politicians, parties in the food chain and representatives from civil society. At this symposium we set out our common objectives for the CAP2013, and have external parties comment on them. These external parties, academics and representatives of consumers' and environmental organisations, as well as the distribution sector take a positive but critical look at our story. In this way they can strengthen, support and possibly even broaden our case.

Representatives of ministers Benoit Lutgen and Kris Peeters, responsible in the Walloon Region and Flanders for matters including agriculture and rural policy, will also respond to the vision of civil society.

We also reach out to the public to allow it to have its say on our proposals and further open up the debate, at European level and within the Member States or their own organisations. This is still just the start of the debate about the future of the CAP! But it does show that it is possible to look for solutions together. Much wider dialogue between all stakeholders at all levels is due!