

Consensus text of Boerenbond and VODO Working Group on Agriculture on CAP basic objectives

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Photo: Stéphane Desgain



Context:

The preparatory talks on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period after 2013 have already fully started and as members of the VODO Working Group on Agriculture and Boerenbond we observe that we are largely on the same wavelength concerning the objectives of the post 2013 CAP. Therefore we took the initiative to set up a series of joint dialogue sessions on the topic.

This text should be considered as the result of that dialogue sessions series. It also represents the vision of the VODO Working Group on Agriculture and of Boerenbond. We have also made a survey of the elements on which we do not hold the same opinion or for which the debate among ourselves should be continued in a more detailed way.

For the future of our agriculture we opt for sustainable forms of farming and that option is the subject of the statements in the following text.

Basic assumptions:

- The right to food is a universal human right, which must be recognized and supported by the CAP.
- The discussion on the objectives of the CAP should precede the definition of CAP tools and the establishment of a financial framework for the period 2014-2020.
- The main purpose of sustainable agriculture is to produce food in order to meet the basic needs of all citizens. Sustainable agriculture uses practices that are economically efficient, respect the ecological capacities and are socially acceptable for the present generation, without compromising the opportunities of future generations.

The economic dimension of sustainable agriculture implies that producers receive a fair price for their work and hold the prospect of a livable future. This requires guaranteed access to production factors: soil, water, agrobiodiversity, credits, ...

The social dimension of sustainable agriculture implies that the practice of agricultural activities should contribute to the social stability in society. Farmers provide food, a basic need of all people. Agriculture provides a contribution to various social functions such as employment, rural development, recreation, etc. Therefore farmers deserve respect and need to have perspectives for the future.

The ecological dimension of sustainable agriculture implies that the impact of agricultural activities on the environment, climate and nature does not prevent future generations from enjoying a healthy environment and a rich natural environment and that the production factors soil, water and biodiversity are kept in good condition.

A. Producing sufficient quality food

- The European agricultural sector is facing the multiple challenge to produce sufficient, safe, varied and quality food in a sustainable way, first and foremost for the population of Europe.
- At the same time the agricultural sector must contribute to solutions for the upcoming climate, energy and commodity crises in a context of growing world population and limited natural resources (fertile farming land, water, phosphate, biodiversity).
- Family farming is essential in Europe to guarantee food security within the own region in accordance with local needs and cultural expectations.
- The strategic cornerstone for food security is an adequate degree of self-sufficiency in basic products.
- An adequate food production requires investments in sustainable family farms and a strong agricultural policy that is in line with the proper characteristics of agriculture and meets the expectations of society.
- Due attention should be paid to the preservation of sufficient farming land in Europe.

B. Producing affordable food

- Basic food of good quality must be available for all at a reasonable price.
- The supply of affordable food for the weakest groups in society in Europe should also remain a point of concern in policy making.
- Transparent agricultural chains can help to achieve an acceptable price for consumers and a profitable price for producers. Important elements in this context are investments in efficient agricultural production systems, sound competition in delivery and marketing and the stabilization of agricultural markets.
- As food production depends on biological processes and weather conditions and as consumers need food every day, the short term food supply and demand is not very flexible and hence agricultural markets tend to be volatile by nature. Policy measures and market corrections are therefore needed to guarantee the supply of sufficient and affordable food and to prevent structural surpluses.

C. Ensuring a livable income to farmers

- A livable income for farmers and horticulturalists is a condition for guaranteeing an adequate and continuous agricultural production.
- A sustainable family farming sector is the cornerstone of a livable countryside providing employment on the whole European territory.
- Efforts to set up and maintain livable, well-developed and future oriented farms are essential in this.
- Specific measures to promote the transferability and conversion of farms are needed, particularly for starting farmers.
- The price for the producer should be profitable in the medium term; otherwise the agricultural system may get disrupted.
- The volatility of agricultural markets and the trend for minimum prices have a cost for farmers, processing companies and consumers. Stabilizing policies are essential.
- The correct distribution of added value within the chain should be guaranteed by strengthening the negotiating position of family farmers. A correction is needed to restore the power balance within the chain. In this context, the development of short chains may provide a part of the solution.

D. Achieving broader societal objectives

- In recent decades the societal expectations and demands of European citizens vis-à-vis agriculture have strongly evolved and still are evolving. Agriculture plays a multifunctional role and does not only provide food but also delivers various services: green (nature and landscape management), blue (water management) and yellow services (social care, walking, cycling, enjoyment, rural classes) and employment. This broadened scope of agriculture provides an additional value for farms, the countryside and society.
- There is growing concern to make the European agricultural systems more sustainable. Thus there is growing attention for integral water management and climate change, for energy savings and the switch-over to sustainable energy sources, for controlling air pollution and erosion, for reducing the use of crop protection products and for promoting integrated and organic cultivation methods, for closed cycles and short chain marketing, for a enjoyable countryside offering diversity and conservation of varied landscapes, for sufficient natural areas and forests, for fair trade and production of domestic feed and for more animal-friendly production methods.
- Farmers and the farming sector have already made numerous efforts and will continue to make the necessary efforts in the future. A stimulating agricultural policy that takes into account the additional costs of those societal requirements must support these efforts, because in practice consumers and the market are only to a limited degree prepared to pay a higher price for this.

E. Ecological sustainability

- Agriculture has an impact on the environment, nature and landscape and in turn requires natural resources (land, water, soil, air, biodiversity).
- It is necessary to keep the air, soil, water, open space and agrobiodiversity all over the world in good condition so that the next generations can enjoy them as well. Agriculture should contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the improvement of the water, air and soil quality and to the preservation of biodiversity.
- In order to promote the sustainable use of the scarce resources, the relevant regulations must be clear and stable and provide legal certainty. They must also be supported by stimulating policies, the impact of which is assessed on a regular basis as to their ecological performance. Additional efforts are needed to keep the regulations as simple as possible and to reduce the administrative burden for the involved farmers to a minimum.
- In its policies Europe has already internalized a number of externalities, more so than other countries and continents. Europe will have to reinforce this policy in order to achieve an ecologically sustainable agriculture. This European policy framework is not recognized by the WTO (Non-Trade Concerns) and may be a source of unfair competition. Corrective measures are therefore justified and necessary.

F. A solidary agricultural policy

- Through its trade flows the CAP has an impact on agriculture in developing countries.
- All regions, and particularly regions with developing countries, have the right as well as the duty to develop an agricultural policy that meets the needs and expectations of the society concerned and its family farmers. Regulation of imports and variable market protection are integral parts of this.
- Trade flows must not be destructive for family farming in other regions. The proper food security regarding basic products should be guaranteed and the domestic agricultural system should get development chances.
- Three building stones for ensuring livable family farming: first of all take care of the own food supply in the region, next aim at trade regulation (e.g. with preferential trade agreements) and then smooth international trade transactions according to the rules of the WTO.
- A fair and solidary agricultural policy takes measures to restrict the volatility of markets, to better harmonize supply and demand and to enable strategic food stocks. It also supports sustainable production methods and limits financial speculative activities on future markets for farming products.
- Undesired impacts due to unfair competition of the CAP on agricultural systems in vulnerable /other countries, particularly in developing countries, should be avoided.
- Agricultural organizations must be recognized as the representatives of farmers and their participation is very much welcome.

Points on which we did not reach agreement /that require further dialogue

- What do we mean by family farming?
- What do we mean by quality food and sustainable consumption patterns?
- What do we mean by efficient production systems/agricultural sector /agricultural chains?
- What do we mean by livable incomes for family farms? Where lies the reference? What kind of farms should be supported?
- What do we mean by degree of self-sufficiency (relative/absolute) and the need to avoid structural surpluses by means of supply control?
- Definition of dumping as the export of products that can be offered below cost price thanks to direct or indirect subsidies.
- The extreme dependence on imported feed must be drastically reduced.
- Genetically modified crops are not wanted.

This consensus text is endorsed by Boerenbond and by the VODO Working Group on Agriculture.

The following members of the VODO Working Group on Agriculture made a contribution:

Oxfam

BBL

Wervel

Broederlijk Delen

Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network

Vredeseilanden