

Iris Bouwers

Vice President of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)

Brussels

AGRI Hearing "Young farmers' policies after the 2013 CAP reform" - 23.11.2017

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



MEP Siekierski, speakers, my fellow young farmers, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning to you all. My name is Iris Bouwers, I am a young farmer from the Netherlands. I work with my parents on a mixed farm with arable land and fattening pigs. I am also one of the Vice Presidents of CEJA, as well as being on the board of the Dutch Young Farmers Association.

The communication on the future CAP is of crucial importance to young farmers across Europe, but also to the broader agricultural sector. Ladies and gentlemen, without young farmers working to produce food, keep rural areas alive, and push for innovation and sustainability, our countryside would be in a sorry state.

Only 5.6% of farmers in the EU are under the age of 35. A recent survey put together by CEJA and DeLaval and carried out among young farmers, revealed another disturbing result: only 1 in 5 of the respondents consider their future as young farmers to be very likely.

These figures show there is a crisis in farming. We must ask ourselves why this is the norm in so many of Europe's rural areas. It is our duty as representatives, politicians, agricultural stakeholders, but above all as European citizens, to find solutions and help young people return to the fields.

Here is where the future CAP comes in.

As CEJA, we want a variety of instruments that support generational renewal to be spread across the CAP. There must also be a more ambitious CAP budget, 20% should be aimed at generational renewal, and a strong definition of active farmer in order to better target CAP supports.

CEJA considers active farmers to be those who: take the financial responsibility for managing the business and production and who sell products individually or through cooperatives, are recognised as such by the public administration, and deliver public goods from their agricultural activity.

In terms payments and succession, the future CAP must:

- reorient direct payments to ensure the viability of EU family farms and improve generational renewal through a combination of hectare-based and activity- based payments, coupled support in vulnerable sectors, and a top up for young farmers;
- modernise the decoupled payment system so that direct payments are not only linked to land; and
- take legislative action to establish national programmes that facilitate land mobility and succession planning services.

Knowledge transfer and advisory services are also crucial to ensuring young people enter into or remain involved in farming. There must be greater collaboration between generations of farmers through share-farming, long-term leasing and land mobility services.

I myself have benefitted from the transfer of knowledge between the generations in my family. In 1961, my grandfather took over the farm from his father. They had 5 cows, 2 pigs and 7 hectares of land. He was able to grow and sustain the farm because of the bank, the CAP and his own entrepreneurship.

In 1997, my father took over the farm from my grandfather. They had 25 cows, 360 pigs and 60 hectares of land. He was able to grow and sustain it because of the bank, the CAP and his own entrepreneurship.

Now, in 2017, I am farming with my parents on a farm with 1250 fattening pigs and 120 hectares of land. I hope to take over in future. But in order to be able to sustain it I will need the bank, a fitting CAP and my own entrepreneurship. It is evident that I could not be farming the way I do now, without the family farm.

Indeed, access to land remains one of the biggest hurdles for young people wanting to become farmers. As CEJA we deem it important that the future CAP implement measures to help land become available through, for example:

- a mandatory link between access to land and the definition of active farmer;
- implementing tools that allow for full management transition of the enterprise so the young farmer can make entrepreneurial management decisions; and

- paying particular attention to young people who don't come from a farming background by implementing a mandatory programme to facilitate access for new young entrants.

We maintain that the state aid exemption for land acquisition for young farmers is essential in order to increase their numbers across the EU. Young farmers must also have financial backing to access credit, as well as start-up and continuous investment aid throughout the budgetary period.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) should not be the only budgetary fund supporting the growth of rural areas. National reserves must also be backed financially so that every young farmer is brought up to the national average of each Member State.

One final point on our expectations for the CAP communication, though there are many that I have not mentioned, is that young people in rural areas must have the same access to services as their urban colleagues.

Farming is not purely economic, it has a social dimension too. We must ensure a countryside in which people can develop farms and support their families. Rural communities that are connected physically, with efficient transport links, and virtually, through high-speed broadband, are as essential to the countryside as the other factors I have mentioned.



Nowadays, being young and a farmer is an uphill struggle. Sometimes, it seems that passion is the only thing keeping us going. This is why generational renewal must be a cornerstone of the future CAP and why we have high hopes and ambitions for the communication.

Agriculture is vital to the wellbeing of the EU and its citizens. If young farmers struggle to make ends meet they will leave the sector, as the statistics I presented you with at the beginning of my speech demonstrated.

Now is the time to make the dream of generational renewal in European agriculture a reality.

Thank you.