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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations

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Subject: European Agriculture and Forestry: the backbone of a competitive,  
sovereign and prosperous EU  
*- Note by Austria, supported by Czechia, Finland, Greece, Lithuania,  
Poland and Slovakia*

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Delegations will find in the Annex a note from Austria, supported by Czechia, Finland, Greece, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia on the above-mentioned subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 15 July 2024.

## **European Agriculture and Forestry: the backbone of a competitive, sovereign and prosperous EU**

*Note by Austria, supported by Czechia, Finland, Greece, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia*

The European agricultural and forest-based sectors go far beyond the mere production of food and provision of raw materials:

- They are **key drivers for a competitive prosperous and innovative Union**. Agriculture and food production provide for more than 12 million jobs in the European Union and add a gross value of € 178 billion per year to the EU's economy<sup>1</sup>. The European forest based sector provides for 17.5 million jobs across Europe, and the total gross value added of Europe's forestry and wood industries amounts to € 1.1 trillion<sup>2</sup>.
- They are **strong pillars of the Union's strategic autonomy**. Food security and energy independence through agricultural and forest biomass and the bioeconomy are strategic assets and key contributors to the Union's security, strategic autonomy and reduce external dependencies. Agriculture and forestry are the backbone of a green transition and provide the "4Fs" Food, Feed, Fuel and Fiber for a growing demand of renewable raw materials. They can only be provided if production is maintained and promoted in Europe, which is particularly important considering the current geopolitical context.
- They are the **backbone of vital rural areas** that are core to the European way of life, identity and cultural traditions. This comes with a positive impact on jobs and economic strength along the entire value chain, including but not limited to sustainable tourism, and the green and digital transitions.

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<sup>1</sup> [Source](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The economic impact of the forestry and wood industry in Europe in terms of bioeconomy \(bml.gv.at\)](#)

The essential contribution of agriculture and forestry to the Union's prosperity is a result of a tireless commitment of farmers and foresters throughout the Union. Based on their continuous engagement for increased environmental, animal welfare and social standards, European farmers set the global benchmark for sustainable farming practices. Equally, sustainable forest management has been the standard for the longest time in the EU. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has provided much-needed support to farmers over the last decades. With the latest Reform of the CAP, the European agricultural sector once again set new and high standards and goals to achieve the right balance of economic, ecologic and social sustainability thereby contributing towards achieving sustainable food systems at large.

There is no doubt that the agricultural sector will continue to deliver on food security and public goods, such as vibrant rural areas, while simultaneously producing ecosystem services for a healthy and prosperous environment. However, to successfully contribute to the Union's strategic autonomy, sovereignty and long-term competitiveness, farmers and the agricultural sector need a stable and predictable policy framework. Ever more and stricter requirements for agricultural production in addition to a demanding and challenging general market situation will weaken and endanger this key strategic sector. Moreover, it is imperative that the natural restraints of nature-based sectors such as is the case for the agricultural sector and its vital contribution to our natural environments are considered. In contrast to other areas, agricultural emissions largely arise from natural processes and can therefore only be reduced to a certain degree without endangering production.

The supporting delegations reiterate that any European legal framework or initiative must protect and ensure the ability of the agricultural and forest sectors to fulfil their multiple functions and thereby contribute to a stronger EU.

Against this background, the supporting delegations call on the future Commission to

- commit to a **strong Common Agricultural Policy, a fair income for farmers and vital rural areas** to guarantee food security and prosperity, social cohesion in particular in rural areas and to promote environmentally friendly, biodiversity promoting farming practices and to continue its efforts to contribute to climate change mitigation – as laid out in the Strategic Agenda, endorsed on 28 June 2024 ;
- recognize the **contribution CAP and national strategic plans** make in supporting more sustainable farming practices, which provide an adequate framework for continued efforts to green transition in the context of CAP post 2027, the natural **limits of agriculture in its ability to move towards emission-free production** and its important role of providing food security for EU citizens and therefore define requirements tailored to its needs and the unique role of the agricultural sector whilst not compromising EU food production;
- heed EUCO’s call for a pragmatic approach to 2050 climate neutrality and thus thoroughly consider impacts on agriculture and sustainable multifunctional forest management when setting 2040 climate targets;
- timely undertake a **comprehensive stock-taking exercise on the Green Deal legislation and its cumulative** impact on EU-agriculture and forestry, accompanied by an action plan to incentivize active and sustainable agricultural production and forest management while equally keeping EU agricultural and forest land in production throughout its territory, including areas with natural constraints;
- take into account the benefits of the **bioeconomy**, which depends on the services provided by the agricultural and forestry sectors, and enable its full potential through the **substitution** of fossil raw materials and fossil fuels **with wood-based products** and promote the storage of carbon therein;
- promote active **sustainable forest management** to adapt forests to climate change and to increase their resilience;

- firmly reconsider the time frame for the **application of the deforestation regulation** and adequately **address serious concerns related to its implementation**;
  - focus on **simplified and less bureaucratic requirements for farmers, boosting competitiveness and** strengthening their position in the food value chain;
  - revise the **protection status of large carnivores such as wolves and** in some Member States **bears** in order to secure traditional and extensive agricultural production systems;
  - recognize the importance of traditional and extensive agricultural production systems and their benefits for sustainable food systems, biodiversity, the maintenance of alpine and mountain pastures, meadows and pastures in other areas, as well as protection against natural disasters and sustainable tourism.
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