

Annex to the European Citizens' Initiative **“Save bees and farmers! Towards a Bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment”**

The elaboration of this Annex is an ongoing process based on discussions we are having with experts (farmers, environmentalists, citizens, scientists, institutional decision-makers, etc.) that progressively enrich our work.

The significant decline of bees and pollinators in Europe and worldwide is just the tip of the iceberg in the collapse of biodiversity we are currently witnessing. Scientific experts have declared that “business as usual” cannot remain an option¹. Scientific reports have recently confirmed that our food production model is a major driver of biodiversity collapse, also because of the massive use of synthetic pesticides it relies upon. In parallel, this industrial food production model is responsible for 10% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions².

Furthermore, synthetic pesticides have important consequences on human health, favouring diseases among rural communities as well as among consumers via pesticide residues that are present in food, as well as pesticide drift in the air and runoff in soil and groundwater. Among others, exposure to pesticides is linked to cancer, Parkinson's disease, and reproductive impairments.

A third major consequence of industrial agriculture is the sharp decline in social and economic diversity amongst farmers. Over the past 10 years, a farm has disappeared in the EU on average every 3 minutes. This is leading to depleted rural areas and a huge loss of valuable knowledge and traditions.

The European Union has supported this phenomenon with public money for decades through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as well as with regulations, trade agreements and a research policy favouring industrial agriculture and retailers.

Fortunately, over the last fifty years organic farming and agroecology have paved the way to showing that feeding the EU and the world without having to resort to using synthetic pesticides is indeed not only feasible, but in everyone's interest. Diverse landscapes and farming practices are at the base of sustainable food production, in line with the preservation of family farming and the protection of biodiversity: these will contribute to meeting our climate protection goals. **We call on the European Commission to mobilise the necessary financial and human resources to lead the EU towards an agricultural model that respects the needs of future generations.**

Heading towards this path means abandoning industrial food systems. The current industrial agricultural model has allowed European consumers to buy cheap food on the back of farmers'

¹IPBES, 2019, <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services>
²IPCC, 2019, https://www.ipcc.ch/2019/08/08/land-is-a-critical-resource_srccl/

wellbeing and at the expense of biodiversity loss. Such a system has been possible through the unbridled use of chemicals, whilst farmers' revenues were kept scandalously low and unstable. We consider that everyone should have the right to pesticide-free food, regardless of their income. Prioritising the environment and food quality as well as the economical sustainability of farmers will result in a different food system, where public money and consumer spending shall benefit farmers and the environment directly, rather than companies profiting from the sale of agrichemical inputs.

This major paradigm shift we are asking for must in no way put EU farmers at a disadvantage compared to their competitors on the world market. Therefore, in order to be comprehensive, our demands do not only cover the Union's Common Agricultural Policy, pesticide regulation and environmental policy, but shall also cover international trade relations.

Our ECI calls on the European Commission to propose to Member States and the European Parliament legal acts to:

1. ***phase-out synthetic pesticides from EU agriculture by 2035 latest.*** The most toxic ones shall be banned first and at least 80% of the way should be gone by 2030.
2. ***restore biodiversity.*** We especially call for a restoration of natural habitats in agricultural areas. Agriculture and biodiversity are not mutually exclusive, but must benefit each other.
3. ***support farmers in the transition*** towards a bee-friendly agriculture. This necessary transition shall be used to strongly support farmers by prioritising small scale, diverse and sustainable farming.

1. Phase-out synthetic pesticides

We ask the European Commission to propose legal acts to phase-out synthetic pesticides from EU agriculture within 15 years. Pesticides that are part of the "Candidates For Substitution list"³ are among the most toxic on the market; they shall be phased out within 2 years. Insecticides and herbicides shall be phased out within 5 years, while fungicides shall be gradually phased out within 10-15 years, leaving time for agricultural sectors that are highly susceptible to fungi (e.g. wine growers) to develop innovative practices or non-genetically modified resistant varieties.

We consider 15 years to be a realistic amount of time to smoothly enable our agricultural sector to transition towards agroecological practices; at the same time, we believe it is not an excessively long period of time compared to the urgency of modifying our practices to counter biodiversity loss and climate change.

While pesticides are still in use, the Commission has to address the problem of spray drift and the presence of pesticide residues in the air. Indeed, such drifts seriously threaten citizens' health and contaminate organic farmers' harvests. Organic farmers shall be compensated in

³https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/plant/docs/pesticides_ppp_app-proc_cfs_draft-list.pdf

case their harvest is declassified because of pesticide contamination. Compensation has to be fast, and must follow the “polluter pays” principle.

Such a plan will need dramatic changes in agronomic practices followed by the majority of EU farmers, and will hence require massive support from public authorities, as detailed in paragraph 3. In no way can farmers become victims of such a transition; rather, they should be among the primary beneficiaries both in terms of health and financial sustainability.

2. Restore biodiversity

We call on the Commission and Member States to finance a master plan to restore biodiversity in agricultural areas throughout the EU. Given that from 2014 to 2020, 38% of the Union’s budget (that is, 408,3 billion euros) was spent on an agricultural policy which garnered low public consent, we consider there is enough money to finance the transition towards environmentally-friendly practices as well as to support decent living standards for farmers.

Biodiversity restoration in agricultural areas can take many different forms, depending on the existing landscape structure and on the current state of biodiversity. Most urgently, biodiversity is to be restored in areas cultivated under intensive agriculture, where arable crops leave no space to natural habitats. Therefore, we hereby provide some biodiversity-enhancing solutions; despite these, we wish to underline that there is no “one size fits all” quick fix: solutions must be adapted to the specific needs and diversity of different landscapes.

A) Plant bee-friendly trees and hedges along fields

Landscape elements such as trees, wildflower strips and hedges serve as habitats where insects, birds, lizards and many other animals forage, breed and find shelter, among them beneficial ones that pollinate crops or fight pests.

We call on the European Union to finance the planting of hedges and trees along and within arable fields. Agroforestry shall be developed and the costs linked to the maintenance of hedges shall be supported by public money for the ecosystem services they represent.

Many other possibilities exist to plant hedges and trees, including fruit trees along paths and roads.

Such a measure would also strongly benefit climate policies, as hedges and trees capture carbon that can then be stored in the soil via wood chips.

B) Promote leguminous varieties to benefit biodiversity, soils and farmers

In a pesticide-free agriculture, bee-attractive leguminous plants play a vital role: they provide feed for beneficial insects while at the same time enriching soils in nitrogen, thus naturally fertilizing soils and promoting living soils. Furthermore, bee-attractive pulses (lentils, chickpeas, beans...) are a major substitute for reducing meat consumption. They can also be given to

livestock in replacement of glyphosate (and other) herbicide-resistant GM soy imported from third countries.

We thus call on the Commission to promote farmers' production of leguminous crops by sufficiently rewarding them financially for the ecosystem services that such crops offer.

C. Make grassland bee-friendly again

Grasslands are important habitats for bees and pollinators. Intensely used and overused grasslands constrain feed for bees as well as other insects, and reduce ecosystem diversity. Extensive management of grassland, without pesticides and chemical fertilizers is a measure that can quickly enhance biodiversity.

D. Protect water bodies from agrochemicals and erosion

Non-cultivated strips (e.g. 5m) on each side shall be imposed along water courses in order to protect aquatic ecosystems from contamination by pesticides, fertilizers and from erosion.

E. Re-wet marshlands and high moors

This measure would strongly benefit climate protection. The Commission should financially support the re-wetting of marshlands, high- and transitional moors, as well as invest in research to make better agricultural use of these lands („paludiculture“). High moors are not only one of the most important carbon sinks in Europe, but also host unique ecosystems with a biodiversity typical only to them.

3. Support farmers

A. Stop importing agricultural products which do not meet European standards

The European Commission shall take action to protect our farmers from unfair competition with farmers from third countries that still use synthetic pesticides or GMOs, . Imported food or feed containing pesticide residues shall be prevented by setting the Maximum Residue Limit to the minimum and GM food and feed shall no longer be authorised for imports.

Such a measure would be beneficial for the environment, as well as public health and climate protection in third countries.

B. Prioritise small-scale farming in the Common Agricultural Policy

For the last few decades, the largest part of the CAP budget went to a small proportion of big industrial farms as well as to agrochemical companies. This has supported the concentration of agriculture as farmers were required to scale up in order to remain competitive: as such, CAP money has served the purpose of facilitating the proliferation of industrial food systems. We call on the Commission to completely reform the way CAP subsidies are allocated.

CAP funds should ensure farmers are guaranteed a decent living, rewarding in particular those who voluntarily decide to stop using any pesticide before the end of the 15 year-plan. CAP money should gradually stop supporting farming practices that are not in line with a pesticide-free and bee-friendly agriculture (short or no crop rotations, monocultures, steady or increased use of pesticides...). Payments should support farmers for the public value they create by producing high quality food while protecting biodiversity and climate on their land. This will automatically reward small and organic farms more than big and industrialised ones.

In no case can CAP money continue to support industrial agriculture.

C. Establish, together with Member States, a training Masterplan

Firstly, farmers shall be offered training on agro-ecological practices for free. Member States will develop highly knowledgeable decentralized training centres as well as demonstration farms to implement the breadth of knowledge that is already available.

Secondly, Member States shall develop public advice bodies to support farmers during the growing season for all crops.

Such measures shall be financed with public money. Member States shall guarantee that farmers do not become victims of this system change, but rather frontline actors of the transition, accompanied by public authorities.

D. Increase knowledge dissemination and orient research towards a pesticide- and GMO-free agriculture

The European Commission shall develop a database of current agro-ecological practices for each crop in order to facilitate Member States' work in capacity building.

Public funding for the development of synthetic pesticides and GMOs shall immediately be stopped throughout the EU and research into organic farming and agroecological practices will be strongly increased.

E. Suppress conflicts of interest in the provision of advice to farmers

Immediately prohibit the provision of advice to farmers by retailers, including cooperatives that have a financial interest in promoting and selling pesticides.

F. Support artisanal food production and regional markets

Public authorities shall ensure a significant level of support in the development of craft food production and the sale of small-scale farms' products. Indeed, short supply chains need to be (re-)developed in order to ensure a proper and fair distribution of local production, especially for remote areas and in order to supply bigger cities. Regulations on food processing and hygiene should favour on-farm food processing and small-scale dairy factories, slaughterhouses, mills, malthouses and other factories. Food processing should thus be decentralised by supporting small-scale production. This would have a major impact on employment in rural areas.

G. Impose mandatory declaration of origin for all food products

Make the indication of the country of origin mandatory for all processed and unprocessed foods circulating in EU, including ingredients. Improve labels' consistency, including harmonized information about production and processing methods in order to ensure transparency throughout the food chain.

Introducing a mandatory declaration of origin will support regional food production.

H. Develop mechanisms to limit the production of animal products

Overproduction of animal products, especially milk and meat, puts high pressure on both the environment and the price farmers receive for their products. The Commission shall implement a market responsibility programme to quickly react to imbalances and to enable farmers to reduce production in case of falling prices. Horizontal cooperation of farmers shall be exempt from European competition legislation to improve their bargaining power in negotiations with food processors and retailers.

Conclusion

The current way food is produced in the EU is detrimental to most farmers as well as to rural communities, to the environment and human health. With this annex, we intend to provide EU citizens and decision-makers our vision for the future of EU agriculture. This vision is based on consultations that we are continuously carrying out with farmers, citizens, scientists, decision makers and environmental organisations.