


copa\*cogeca

european farmers

european agri-cooperatives

# REPOSITIONING AGRICULTURE AS A STRATEGIC ASSET FOR EUROPE

*European Election Manifesto 2024*



**AGRICULTURE 2030**



# **AGRICULTURE IS A STRATEGIC SECTOR FOR TOMORROW'S EUROPE**

Agriculture has always been at the core of the European project because of its strategic importance. Agriculture is a primary pillar of the European economy, supporting and producing for a wide range of sectors and players while ensuring EU food autonomy. This strategic role must be constantly borne in mind, particularly in the years ahead, as the challenges become more numerous for the entire European agricultural sector.

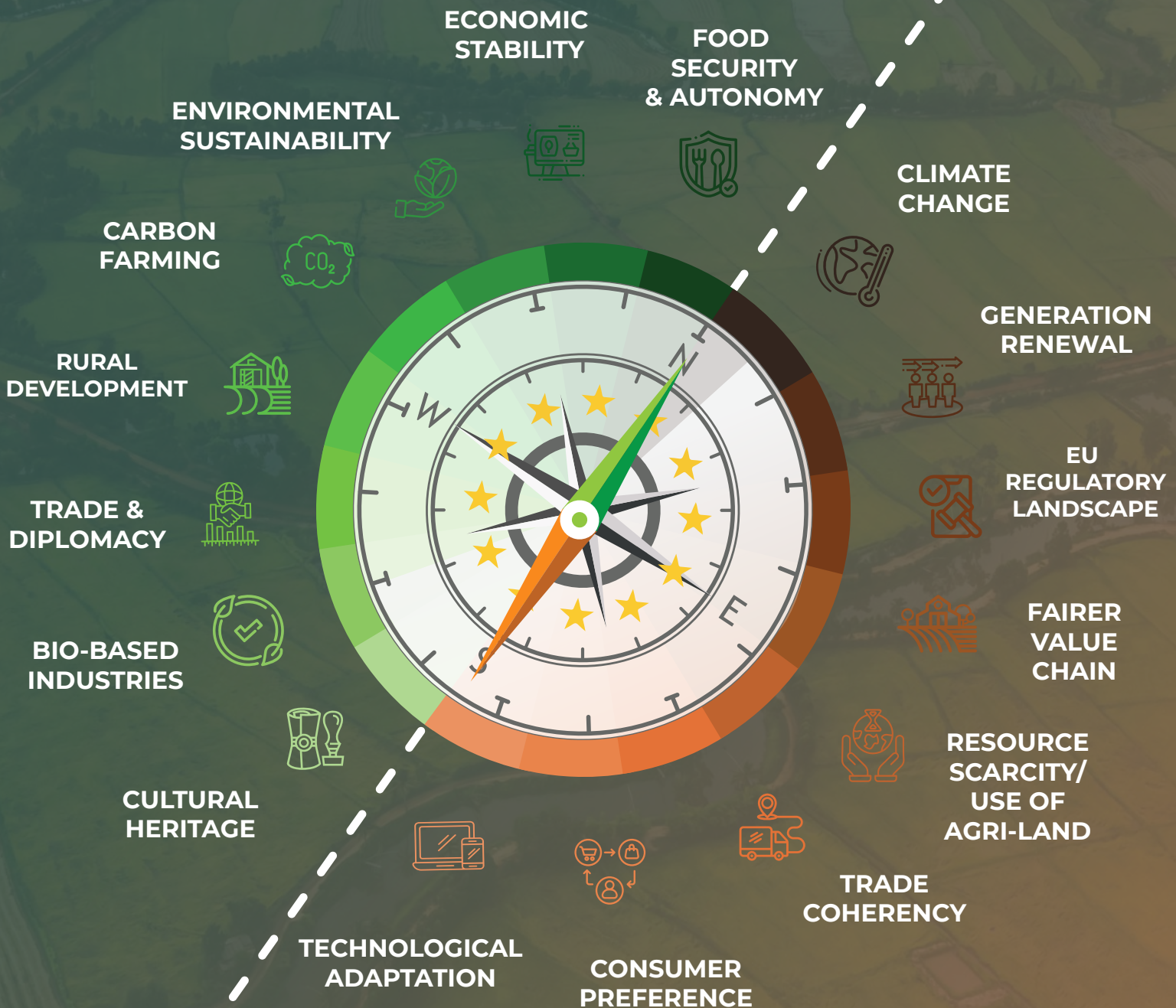
The EU farming community is made of convinced Europeans. The farming protests that have been multiplying over the past months show that it is urgent for the European Union to put rural areas and agriculture back at the centre of the debate, to retrieve its agricultural compass. In this regard, the strategic dialogue instigated by the current President of the European Commission represents a positive step forward, and its approach should be sustained throughout the 2024-2029 mandate.

Farmers, foresters and their cooperatives are actively engaged in making the required transitions for climate and biodiversity, and we advocate for European policies that look ahead and strategically support the sector. With investment and innovation, we are providers of solutions by developing a climate smart and sustainable agriculture. We are committed to contributing to achieving EU climate neutrality by 2050 by reducing our emissions, producing biofuels, bioenergy, and bio-based materials, and by increasing the carbon sink that agriculture and forestry can represent by optimising CO<sub>2</sub> absorption of ecosystems while replacing fossil fuels. Nevertheless, the production of food (incl. feed) remains a central factor, as per Article 2 (b) of the Paris Agreement.

To meet the challenges facing agriculture, and to initiate this need for a renewed dialogue with the European institutions, Copa and Cogeca have identified 7 key priorities for the Commission's next term of office, as well as 4 enablers that will help get agriculture back on track!



# AGRICULTURE IS A **STRATEGIC** SECTOR FOR TOMORROW'S EUROPE FOR...



... **BUT EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE**  
**FACES AN INCREASING NUMBER OF**  
**CHALLENGES**



# **SEVEN KEY AREAS OF ACTION FOR THE FUTURE OF EU FARMING**

With the many challenges facing Europe's farming communities, it will be important to establish clear priorities, focusing on solutions rather than 'top-down' agenda, and to ensure that the whole picture is coherent and clear on the ground.

To reach this objective, Copa and Cogeca have identified 7 key areas of action for our future:






# Reconciling climate change mitigation, nature conservation and agri-food production

# 1

Farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives have increased their efforts to integrate sustainability in their daily practices and these came at a cost. While there are demands to further deliver on environmental and social sustainability, European farmers can deliver on these demands provided that their competitiveness is safeguarded.

Farm income in the EU is still less than half of gross wages and salaries in the EU and therefore economic stability should be moved up the agenda in view of inflationary trends. In this respect the improvement of the position of European farmers along the food chain is needed. This could be done by:


-  Urgently assuring our 9 million farms a **fair remuneration** within the food chain with an effective implementation in each Member States of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive and a correspondent revision
-  Establishing and implementing **effective derogations** to competition law for producers in line with art. 210a of the single CMO and ensure sectoral sustainability standard which guarantee rewarding of sustainability results by farmers and cooperatives.
-  **Promote and also incentivise short value chains and farmers' market networks** that have shown to be an important market outlet for farmers and a positive model for consumers.




# 2

## Reinforcing the competitiveness and profitability of EU agriculture, while maintaining EU sustainable production potential

We are convinced that agriculture, nature conservation and climate mitigation can go hand in hand. To do so, past experience from 2019-2024 shows that it is of primary importance to ensure policy coherence of all legislative initiatives and recognising the importance of the people, the economy and food security in the EU and beyond, equally considering all three pillars of sustainability.

 Copa and Cogeca call for an **Agri Restoration Act**. This policy initiative should have as its objective, to strengthen the social viability, and economic profitability of the agriculture sector while ensuring environmental adaption and mitigation. Key principles of the Agri restoration act would be to: (1) Protect the agricultural sector as the EU protects nature; (2) Legally guarantee access and protect the essential resources needed for farming activities; such as land, water and energy.

 **Better performing and responsive market and risk management measures** should be developed. Being faced with increased and diverse risks, farmers need to be able to have at their disposal a toolbox of workable cost-effective risk management tools. True synergies between different CAP interventions and tools would help farmers improve their resilience, better cope with dramatic and more frequent extreme weather events and better adapt to climate change.




## Ensuring the agricultural generational transition ahead

# 3

Generational renewal in agriculture will be a key challenge for the next Commission. It is a central issue in many agricultural debates, so it is essential that the EU makes it a priority.

 Copa and Cogeca call on the Commission to develop an **ambitious, comprehensive EU strategy for generational renewal in the agricultural sector**, including a 'socioeconomic young farmers' check' in all upcoming agricultural, climate or environmental legislation.

 In addition to CAP support, targeted measures for young farmers should be explored; these measures should be implemented together with a **farm succession scheme** to speed up the transfer of farms from older generations by including attractive collaborative and/or generational renewal support serving all parties involved.





# 4

## Improving plant health and animal health and welfare by fostering research, innovation and digital technologies

Farmers in the future will have to cultivate with even fewer natural resources and deal with further effects derived from climate change such as new pests and diseases while, in addition, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and maintaining the same amount of productivity on the same amount of land. All of this to prevent additional soil degradation or deforestation. On the other hand, safeguarding plant and crop health (e.g., food, ornamentals, seeds etc.) is, in principle, a cornerstone of all farming activities and practices in the European Union, irrespective of the production method, be it conventional, organic, or otherwise.

Digital farming represents an unprecedented opportunity to create value and business opportunities by applying data-driven solutions. Moreover, adapted genetic, robotic, digital and agronomic solutions need to be boosted to reconcile agricultural production with environmental protection.

📍 It is an absolute necessity for all farmers that **new active substances**, with lower impacts on environment and health, whether chemical-synthetic or from biological origin, are approved in a timely manner, as well as implemented and developed swiftly within the next European Commission's mandate.

📍 The EU needs a solid, proportionate and scientific **regulatory framework on NGT** plants that is already put in place from the beginning of the next mandate. Innovation in the plant breeding sector is among the levers that will enable European agriculture to successfully make its transitions.

📍 The fertiliser sector is essential to guaranteeing food security globally. The Commission communication on ensuring the availability and affordability of fertilisers in 2022 was a first step in the right direction. Therefore, **Copa and Cogeca call on the Commission to develop a fertilisers strategy** that brings strategic autonomy in fertilisers and transparency to the EU market and acknowledges the role of circular economy including on-farm solutions such as renure and digestate.

📍 It is essential that **revision of the animal welfare legislation is based on science and feasibility studies** including the impact on trade, competitiveness and relevant transition periods.

📍 Copa and Cogeca call for the application of the precautionary principle until an **appropriate legislative framework which considers the ethical, social, food safety, environmental, and economic dimensions of lab-grown products is in place** and for a comprehensive impact assessment prior to any possible authorisation.








# Boosting EU farmers and forest owners' contributions towards renewable energy and bioeconomy

# 5

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has become even more evident that the EU needs alternative ways to ensure its energy supply and promote the use of local renewable raw materials. European farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives can play a key role in further developing the bioeconomy in EU, including through renewable energy development and by replacing fossil fuels and materials.

 A coherent approach based on the principle of technological neutrality should be implemented in all EU proposals to **diversify and boost energy supplies**. **Bioenergy**/crop based biofuels/biomethane/biogas together with the potential of decentralized on-farm renewable energy production, will play a key role in the EU's energy unit.

 Sustainably managed forests offer raw material that provide a route from fossil economy to circular bioeconomy. Also, the EU must **put bioeconomy back on its agenda**. Wood-based bioeconomy has the potential to contribute to the European Green Deal transition without compromising biodiversity goals. To achieve positive outcomes, enabling a stable business environment for forest-based investments and supporting forest owners in continuing their sustainable forest management, needs to be put high on the EU's agenda.




 The agricultural sector as a strategically important sector can also provide on-farm decentralised energy solutions. There is a lot of **potential on the roofs of farms and barns to produce electricity, or to have on-farm wind energy**. This potential should be unlocked with investment support so it can be used by our rural communities.



# 6

## Cooperative enterprises: strengthening their resilience and competitiveness whilst operating in the agri-food and forestry sectors

Agri-cooperatives play a key role in our sectors and for the sustainable development of our society and economies. To boost the competitiveness of agri-cooperative enterprises, maximise their contributions to sustainable growth and avoid jeopardising the positive externalities they create, it is essential that:

-  EU institutions **consider the specific needs and governance elements of agri-cooperative** enterprises.
-  An innovation-driven, science-based and committed environment policy is designed and implemented to fully **unlock the potential of agri-cooperatives in delivering sustainable projects and products**. Enabling regulations and support schemes are essential in the fields of energy efficiency, climate actions, digital infrastructure and development, biodiversity and environmental actions.
-  The **recognition of cooperative enterprises as Producer Organisations**, at their own request, is considered as an option in the framework of the CMO Regulation. This would be an additional measure and support tool to assist Member States where cooperatives in the agri-food sector have not yet reached their full potential.







## Investing and innovating in vibrant rural areas

# 7

Farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives play a fundamental role in the economic development and territorial cohesion in the EU. Being the backbone of vibrant rural areas, they need adequate living and working conditions in rural area and access to services and education. This also includes attracting and supporting young and women farmers. Vibrant rural areas go hand in hand with boosting access to basic services for mobility, learning, child and elderly care, maintain a good transport network for example.

 Within the next EU mandate an **EU rural infrastructure plan should be proposed, reinforcing and implementing the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas by 2040**. This will need massive investments to be realised in dedicated infrastructures. The following dimensions will be **key for farming communities**: decarbonisation (construction or renovation of buildings, purchase of electric vehicles, electrification of processes, creation of methanisation units, agricultural equipment), sustainable transition (reduction of inputs, eco-design, recovery of co-products), digitalisation (broadband, automation, artificial intelligence robotic) and transformation of collection systems (storage and production tools).

 **A strategy which outlines and establishes programmes and targets to improve irrigation infrastructure** for farmers is needed. Prioritising adequate access to water for farming purposes, especially with the ongoing water disturbances which are becoming ever more frequent due to climate, is required.






## **4 OVERARCHING ENABLERS FOR THE FUTURE OF EU FARMING**

To implement the above 7 key policy priorities, Copa and Cogeca have identified 4 enablers in the functioning of the EU that would be decisive in ensuring the support towards farming communities via European policy proposals.



# 1 Budget Alignment: The next EU budget should better reflect EU ambitions when it comes to farming

 We need a strong CAP with **a budget for the post-2027 period that matches the increased needs of the sector while ensuring that dedicated funds outside the CAP are framed.** Whilst it is true that the CAP budget represents around a third of the EU budget, when we look at GDP, EU agriculture uses 0.4% of the GDP while its contribution to the EU GDP is three times higher (around 1.3% for the EU GDP in 2022). Furthermore, should Ukraine (and/or others) become a member of the EU, and considering that it would lead to a significant increase (a minimum of 30%) of the EU's farmed areas, increased funding will be required. The possible access of the candidate States will bring crucial challenges to the whole European agricultural system, which will be affected both financially and productively. Within this prospective it is important to set up safeguard measures and guarantee an appropriate transition period in order to ensure that the CAP has the right instruments to respond to the market needs.

 During the 2019-2024 period, the Green Deal's agricultural and forest related policies have not been the subject of any comprehensive impact on its on-farm cumulative impacts nor feasibility studies to consider potential bottlenecks. **At the start of the next mandate, Copa and Cogeca call on the newly appointed Commission to carry out a global impact assessment of agricultural policies originating from the Green Deal, and to evaluate their financial implications.** This study and its conclusions must be a prerequisite for any further agricultural initiatives, to avoid continuing sailing blindly and ensure policy coherence whilst supporting the goals of the CAP.

 While we understand that the EU's budgetary needs are many, supporting additional actions/policies should not come at the expense of the CAP budget. **On the contrary, more synergies with other funds are needed.** A clear example of this are the current proposals on carbon farming, the nature restoration law and soil.

## Ensuring a trade policy agenda consistent with the ambition for the internal market

# 2


 Ensuring fair trade which guarantees **reciprocity in terms of production standards is key notably to prevent sustainability leakage, while not undermining EU productions and transparency for consumers.** If we face tighter restrictions on cultivation and higher production standards due to the EU framework we expect to be treated fairly at international level.



## Feasibility Studies for any new Agri-related proposals

# 3



 Given the increasingly cross-cutting nature of European agricultural policies, any **new initiatives on the part of the Commission, in line with the principles of Better Regulation, should include an impact assessment**, including a section on 1) its feasibility and necessity, 2) its impact on production, land and rural areas, 3) its impact on generation renewal and 4) the financial implications.

## 4 A commissioner for agriculture and rural areas is needed with a key role as Vice-President of the European Commission

 This should be followed by dedicated resources (financial, human) in line with the strategic role of ensuring food security and affordability. The same prominent role should be assured for the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee and Agriculture Ministers with dedicated competences on all files related to the agri-food chains. Conversely, **we do not believe that a DG Food would be a good institutional response to the strategic repositioning of agriculture.**

 A constant strategic dialogue is needed to maintain a connection between the European Commission and the farming community, in order to obtain feedback from the field on the various proposals made. **Copa and Cogeca therefore call for re-resourcing of civil dialogue groups**, allowing for proper and transparent farmer participation to the legislative preparation/process.

 In terms of the operations of the European institutions, the green deal for agriculture was a regulatory tsunami, with hurried consultations and proposals being rushed through. For the 2024-2029 mandate, we are calling for **less regulation but better quality regulation**, allowing sufficient time for public consultation and feedback on impact assessment within the Commission, in particular. The new legislature needs to assure the tools for farmers and agri-cooperatives to provide food and energy security into the EU while implementing the transition to Sustainable Food Systems.





## **ABOUT COPA-COGECA**

**Copa and Cogeca are the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU. Together, they ensure that EU agriculture is sustainable, innovative and competitive, guaranteeing food security to half a billion people throughout Europe. COPA's members represent lead farming unions at national level, speaking for millions of farmers across Europe. COGECA's members represent the interests of the thousand agricultural cooperatives in Europe.**



# THE EU FARMING VOTE MATTERS!

The European Union plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of European agriculture, and as this manifesto underscores, numerous challenges lie ahead, demanding decisive political action in the upcoming mandate.

To reinstate agriculture's strategic significance within European institutions, a resounding message must be conveyed. This clear message is that of a massive vote by the farming and rural communities. Copa and Cogeca's members are committed to mobilising across regions, dissecting political programmes and proposals, and rallying as many voters as possible for the European elections taking place 6-9 June.

It is also imperative to elect representatives in the next mandate who comprehend and have first hand experience of the challenges faced by rural communities and farmers. We urge European political parties to prioritise this dimension when forming their lists for the European elections, emphasising that a European Parliament devoid of farmer and rural representation would convey an unfavourable signal for the next mandate.

**copa\*cogeca**

european farmers

european agri-cooperatives

**VOTE**