

COPA(24)03054 – PPA/ mt

Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN
President of the European
Commission

Brussels, 11 November 2024

Subject: A coherent trade policy that delivers for farmers and agri-cooperatives

Dear President von der Leyen,

Agriculture is a strategic sector for security and preparedness in Europe. This has always been the case and it was recently reconfirmed by the Commission. It is a vital sector for the future of Europe.

At the same time, it goes without saying that there are challenges for European farming. The farming community is confronted with an unparalleled convergence of economic, climate, and social challenges, such as geopolitical instability, extreme weather events, unfair competition, higher production costs, lack of fair remuneration, and administrative burden.

At this key juncture in the set-up of the EU Institutions, as leaders of EU farmers and agri-cooperatives, we ask again for **stability, visibility and predictability** to be able to look to the future with confidence.

In recent months, the optics on trade from the agricultural sector's perspective have progressively worsened. Between being unjustifiably caught in the crossfire of trade tensions with China, the prospect of the dreaded Mercosur agreement being pushed forward, and the consequences of Russian invasion of Ukraine, farmers and agri-cooperatives seem to be the designated casualty.

Farmers risk being squeezed between worsening export possibilities and an ever-worsened level playing field on their home markets.

While our farmers are still very concerned on the ground, with poor harvests in many EU Member States making the situation as tense as it was at the beginning of 2024, any advances on trade openings would send a negative message, unless the issue of different production standards and a level playing field is adequately addressed, especially on Mercosur. Otherwise, this may undermine the fragile trust that has been built after the spring protests.

The Commission's approach on trade has long been to balance the sensitivities of EU agriculture with the offensive interests of the sector on exports. And this not without success. Under such challenging circumstances, it is difficult not to look with dismay at the discrepancies and incoherence we fear on trade.

With the outcome of the Strategic Dialogue on the future of Agriculture, the strategic importance of the farming sector for both EU's economy and society has been reaffirmed. Another significant outcome of the Strategic Dialogue concerns the key questions related to the future of agri-food trade. Elevating the importance of the agricultural sector in the overall EU's trade strategy and ensuring coherence between our internal and trade policies has been a major request by all participants.

Our sector is a key contributor to **EU's positive trade balance and holds the potential to deliver benefits** not only for farmers and agri-cooperatives across the 27 Member States, but for EU economy and society at large. **Nevertheless, this requires coherence.**

It is therefore key that the Commission shows clear strategic thinking and understanding for the farming sector and its complexities when it comes to trade policy. The Commission should also act coherently, without undermining the livelihood of millions of farmers, the competitiveness of agri-cooperatives, and the possibility of prosperous rural areas.

Agriculture must not be used as a bargaining chip in trade agreements!

In the case of the current **on-going trade disputes with China**, our sectors took decades to establish their presence on the Chinese market. After all the efforts made, they are now left to be the victims of their success. Therefore, we urge the Commission to do its utmost to lift this unjustifiable burden on producers.

It is equally important not to accept an agreement with Mercosur that disregards the key concerns of farmers on the divergence of production standards and on the cumulative effects on sensitive sectors. **European farmers and agri-cooperatives will never endorse an imbalanced and environmentally detrimental trade agreement.** European farmers and their cooperatives understand the need of friends and alliances in these harsh international times. However, in our view, an agreement that jeopardises such a strategic sector as European agriculture does not make sense. The attractiveness of our sector for new generations and our family farming model is simply at stake!

A Mercosur agreement per se, with or without an additional sustainability instrument, is a no-go zone for European farmers, due to the important differences in terms of competitiveness for some sectors. Therefore, an agreement without sufficient compulsory commitment from Mercosur countries on standards linked to animal welfare, the use of medicines in animal production, climate, chemical treatment, and other environmental standards may cause European farmers to take to the streets again. **And no amount would be enough to counterbalance the agreement on a deal that represents a threat to the competitiveness of our sector!**

In the current context **it is also impossible not to take into consideration the efforts our producers will have to make to further advance our trade relationship with Ukraine.** This is an especially critical aspect to take into account as most of the same sensitive sectors concerned are the ones for which we will open our markets to Mercosur countries.

Today, as members of Copa and Cogeca, we emphasise the urgent necessity to address the concerns raised by the thousands of farmers that have taken to the streets in the past months.

We want to continue to contribute to the EU's leading position in agri-food trade and to turn challenges into opportunities, towards a more secure and prosperous future in Europe.

To be able to do this, we want an EU that supports the competitiveness and productivity of farms and agri-cooperatives, ensuring that trade delivers and does not become another burden to carry for our community. This can be done only with a coherent trade policy that recognises the strategic importance of our sector!

Yours faithfully,



Massimiliano Giansanti
President of Copa



Lennart Nilsson
President of Cogeca

Cooperatives



Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich - LKÖ
(Austrian Chamber of Agriculture)

Cooperatives



Österreichischer Raiffeisenverband - ÖRV
(Austrian Raiffeisen Association)



Boerenbond - BB



Hrvatska Poljoprivredna Komora - HPK
(Croatian Chamber of Agriculture)



Fédération Wallonne de l'Agriculture - FWA



Confederation of Finnish Cooperatives -
PELLERVO



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Bulgarian Agrarian Chamber



La Coopération Agricole



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Bulgarian Farmers Union



Deutscher Raiffeisenverband - DRV
(German Raiffeisen Association)



Panagrotikos Farmers' Union
(PANAGROTIKOS)



SASOEE



Agrární Komora České Republiky - AKCR
(Czech Agrarian Chamber)



Irish Co-operative Organisation Society Ltd. - ICOS



Zemědělský Svaz České Republiky - ZSCR
(Agricultural Association of the Czech Republic)



Alleanza delle Cooperative Italiane
Agroalimentare - ACI



Landbrug & Fødevarer - DAFC
(Danish Agriculture and Food Council)



Confederação Nacional das Cooperativas
Agrícolas e do Crédito Agrícola de Portugal -
CONFAGRI



Eesti Põllumajandus-Kaubanduskoda - EPKK
(Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and
Commerce Estonian Farmers Organisations and
Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce))



Zadrúžna Zveza Slovenije - ZZS
(Cooperative Union of Slovenia)



Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajain Keskusliitto - MTK
(Central Union of Agricultural Producers and
Forest Owners)



Chambres d'agriculture France - APCA



Confédération Nationale de la Mutualité, de la
Coopération et du Crédit Agricoles - CNMCCA



Fédération Nationale des Syndicats
d'Exploitants Agricoles - FNSEA



Deutscher Bauernverband e.V. - DBV



NEMZETI
AGRÁRGAZDASÁGI
KAMARA

Nemzeti Agrárgazdasági Kamara - HCA (Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture)



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ΕΠΙΧΕΙΡΕΙΝ

GAIA EPICHEIREIN



IFA

Irish Farmer's Association - IFA



AGRICOLTORI ITALIANI

Cia - Agricoltori italiani



Confagricoltura

Confederazione Generale dell'Agricoltura
Italiana - CONFAGRICOLTURA



Confederazione Nazionale Coldiretti - COLDIRETTI



Zemnieku Saeima - ZSA
(Farmers Parliament)



Lietuvos Respublikos žemės ūkio rūmai - LRŽŪR
(Chamber of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania)



Lietuvos ūkininkų sąjunga - LŪS
(Lithuanian Farmers Union)



Lietuvos Žemės ūkio Bendrovių Asociacija - LŽUBA
(Lithuanian Association of Agricultural Companies)



Centrale Paysanne Luxembourgeoise - CPL
(Luxemburg Farmers' Union)



Koperattivi Malta



Land- en Tuinbouw Organisatie Nederland - LTO



Federacja Branżowych Związków
Producentów Rolnych - FBZPR
(Federation of Agricultural Producers Union)



Krajowa Rada Izb Rolniczych - KRIR
(National Council of Agricultural Chambers)



NSZZ RI Solidarność - SOLIDARNOSC



Związek Zawodowy Rolnictwa
SAMOOBRONA

Związek Zawodowy Rolnictwa SAMOOBRONA
- ZZR



ZWIĄZEK
ZAWODOWY
ROLNIKÓW

Związek Zawodowy Rolników - OJCZYNA
(FARMERS LABOR UNION)



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Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal - CAP



FEDERAȚIA NAȚIONALĂ A PRODUCĂTORILOR
DIN AGRICULTURĂ, INDUSTRIE ALIMENTARĂ
ȘI SERVICII CONEXE - PRO AGRO



UNIUNEA DE RAMURĂ NAȚIONALĂ A
COOPERATIVELOR DIN SECTORUL VEGETAL -
U.N.C.S.V.



LIGA ASOCIAȚIILOR PRODUCĂTORILOR
AGRICOLI DIN ROMANIA - LAPAR



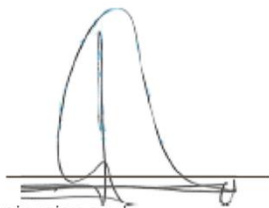
Asociația Forta Fermierilor



Slovenská Poľnohospodárska a Potravinárska
Komora - SPPK
(Slovak Agricultural and Food Chamber)



Asociación Agraria - Jóvenes Agricultores - ASAJA



Coordinadora de Organizaciones de
Agricultores y Ganaderos - COAG - I.R.



Union de Pequeños Agricultores y Ganaderos
- UPA



Perle Bant

Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund - LRF

SLC

Mats Nyberg

Svenska Lantbruksproducenternas Centralförbund (SLC)