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JOINT STATEMENT ON FORESTRY IN THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY OF THE FUTURE CAP

CRUCIAL ROLE OF FORESTRY TOWARDS ACHIEVING EU OBJECTIVES

The commitments on climate change and sustainable development cannot be met without forest owners, their cooperatives and the forestry sector as a whole, which deliver solutions to some of the most complex challenges facing society today. Forests play a prominent role in the Paris Agreement on climate change and is inherently a part of most, if not all, of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

The EU Forest Strategy recognises the important role that forestry plays in contributing to achieve both EU and global objectives, such as on climate, environment, bioeconomy, jobs and growth. Notably, the Strategy stresses that CAP plays a crucial role in enhancing the contribution of forestry to reaching these objectives.

WHAT IS NEEDED FROM THE FUTURE CAP AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY?

Europe's forest owners, farmers and their cooperatives fully support the recognition in the Communication on the Future CAP on the need to continue to step up its response to today's challenges and to focus even more on jobs and growth in rural areas, while further developing the bio-economy, bolstering environmental care and fighting and adapting to climate change. Environmental, social and climate objectives can be met only if the economic sustainability of forest owners and rural actors is ensured.

1. Acknowledgement of the Importance of Forestry in the Future CAP and RD Policy

The important role of multifunctional and sustainably managed forests in Europe's rural areas must be acknowledged in the future CAP and RD policy. A better integration of the forestry sector into these policies is required. This would ensure a viable forest sector as a prerequisite for a sustainable development of the economic, environmental and social functions provided by Europe's forests and therewith to meet EU objectives. A strong budget allocated to the second pillar (RD policy) is needed to tap into the full potential of the forestry sector.

2. Inclusion of Forestry in the Objectives and Interventions

Forestry should be considered as a solution to contribute to CAP objectives and therewith Member States should be enabled to fully leverage on the benefits derived from active, sustainable forest management.

Linked to the objectives and interventions, set up on EU level, a toolbox with measures related to forestry should be fostered in the future CAP strategic plans, according to the important contribution of the forestry sector to specific EU and CAP objectives on competitiveness, management of natural resources, climate change mitigation and adaptation and to employment and growth in rural areas.

The Commission should ensure that Member States show in their CAP strategic plans how forestry contributes to reaching various CAP objectives and which measures are used to support this. Linked to this, CAP strategic plans have to ensure a substantial budget for relevant measures allocated to issues related to the forestry sector.

The toolbox, given the variety of forests in Europe, must take into account that there is no one-size-fits all approach. It should provide attractive conditions for implementing measures in Member States, which will lead to a higher uptake and better possibilities to meeting the objectives. The toolbox should include and support:

- A broad range of forest relevant measures focusing on actively, **sustainably managed forests**
- Further development of a **circular bio-economy** and strengthen and create new value chains
- **Investments** in forestry infrastructure, technologies, broadband and in processing and marketing of forest products
- “**Climate fit forests**”, promoting **resilient** forests and prevention of biotic and abiotic risks such as **forest fires, storms, pests, diseases** and other risks as consequences of the climate change . **Prevention measures**, as well as introduction of new innovative forest management practices which can reduce the risk, should be supported.
- Measures related to payments for **ecosystem services** that are provided by the forestry sector and that offer societal benefits

3. An Overall Framework to Support Skills, Knowledge and Innovation

Apart from a specific forestry toolbox, a supporting overall framework is needed for the sector to benefit from opportunities provided by digitalisation and innovation and to better adapt to future challenges. A framework for supporting the implementation of CAP objectives should include:

- A strong **advisory system**, better adapted and responding to beneficiaries’ needs Targeted training and knowledge exchange with a focus on new technologies, automatization and digitalization
- **Promotion and enhancement of cooperatives**, producer groups and small scale organisations over the long-term
- A more prominent role of forestry in the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (**EIPAgri**) and in the European Network for Rural Development (**ENRD**)
- Better addressing the role of the forestry sector in the activities of the **national rural networks**
- An **EU research agenda** taking the needs and contributions of forestry and rural areas into account

4. A Real Simplification for Beneficiaries

The CAP must be simplified in terms of bureaucratic requirements to be more attractive for beneficiaries and reach a successful implementation of the policy. In addition, the future framework (CAP, RD regulation, state aid guidelines) must be more flexible and allow the use of new information tools promoting reliable and cost-efficient administration. Simpler application, administration and inspection processes are needed, linked to measures that are appealing to beneficiaries. Furthermore, simplification should not only be addressed at the EU level, but also at Member State level. Control and sanctions need to respect the proportionality principle.

THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL ROLE OF FORESTS

Forests stand out due to their multifunctionality. Sustainably and actively managed forests deliver a multitude of benefits, providing the largest non-food renewable resource for a sustainable bio-economy, and around 4 million green jobs in forestry and related industries. At the same time, Europe's forests sequester carbon from the atmosphere as they grow and deliver multiple goods and ecosystem services such as biodiversity, drinking water, non-wood forest products and recreational spaces. Consequently, forestry and the forest-based sector have a crucial role not only tackling challenges related to climate and environment but also challenges related to social and economic sustainability, with forestry as an engine of rural growth.

43% of the EU land area is covered with forests. Thus, forestry is crucial for land use and the management of natural resources in the EU's rural areas. 60% of the forests are in the private ownership of some 16 million European citizens. All in all, forest owners are an indispensable part of viable rural areas and at the same time forest owners are representing a large share of European society. EU's forest owners are together with EU farmers the first stewards of the natural environment, already caring for natural resources exemplary on the EU's land. Therefore, we are convinced that the **future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Rural Development Policy should continue to support and embrace sustainable forest management.**
