



Rural Coalition Statement: “Empowering rural areas in the CAP post-2020”

The Rural Coalition welcomes the nine specific objectives proposed under the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Economic, social and environmental sustainability form the basis for a successful Rural Development strategy within the European Union and in each Member State's CAP Strategic Plan.

As stakeholders representing the rural economy, including farmers, landowners and managers, forest owners, hunters and actors in the livestock value chain, we strongly believe that rural actors should be included in decision-making and implementation processes in order to guarantee the viability of rural communities. Agriculture and forestry, which represent two-thirds of EU land use, play a vital role in rural areas and therefore need to be properly supported.

The Coalition stresses the importance of adequate funding for Rural Development. The announced cuts to the CAP budget and thus to the Rural Development budget do not only send out the wrong message, but could also threaten the existence of rural areas as viable and attractive places in which to live, work and visit. At a time when rural communities face existential threats due to rural exodus and an increasing urban-rural divide, **we call for the Rural Development budget to at least be maintained in real terms.** This will help to support the economic, social and environmental viability of Europe's rural areas.

In addition, the Coalition is of the view that more coherence is needed between the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and other European funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Horizon Europe, to address sustainable development in rural areas. These synergies would enable rural actors to better tackle cross-cutting issues, to improve cooperation and to improve the quality of life in rural areas.

Policy requests

The Coalition is calling on EU policy-makers and Member States to ensure that the following requests, based on the three pillars of sustainability, will be an integral part of the CAP Strategic Plan regulation:

Economic viability and competitiveness of the agri-food and forestry sector

- **Developing and facilitating innovation through digitalisation and increasing high-performance broadband coverage** represent a significant source of growth and employment in the agri-food and forestry sector. Given that the CAP cannot be the only policy to fund innovation in rural areas, there should be synergies between funds for these specific issues. The Coalition welcomes the allocation of €10 billion to **Research and Innovation** in the rural sectors, provided that these funds are channelled into the needs of rural businesses and communities, helping them to tackle challenges, such as **resource efficiency**, biodiversity and climate change, and to benefit from the opportunities that new technologies offer.
- Improving economic operators' ability to cope with risks remains fundamental in the future. **Increasing risks in the agriculture and forestry sector**, be they related to market volatility, pests and diseases, damage to the livestock sector resulting from large carnivores, or extreme weather events, have an impact on the overall economic sustainability of rural areas. Building **resilience** through improved access to risk management tools will optimise the environment for those actors willing to contribute to their community by setting up and maintaining businesses.
- Supporting and further developing **Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)** is fundamental to helping rural actors with the uptake of innovation and new technologies which in turn will improve their competitiveness and sustainability. **Training, advisory services and knowledge transfer** must be improved in the future framework to better target the needs of the users and facilitate entrepreneurship. There must be a specific focus on **young generations, life-long learning** as well as the **role of women in agriculture and forestry**.

Biodiversity, ecosystem services and resource efficiency to tackle climate change

- The sustainable and active management of rural areas provides **ecosystem services**, such as clean air and drinking water, climate regulation and **climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation**, food and biomass production, recreation and soil quality. These services must be fully recognised as contributing to the EU environment and climate objectives and be compensated accordingly. While the CAP post-2020 offers opportunities to enhance environmental sustainability, funding for these targeted measures must be made available to rural development interventions geared towards supporting sustainable land management.
- **Carbon storage and sequestration** should be promoted and support for environmental and climate-related measures, as well as specific measures for Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) should be maintained. Support for **natural or other area-specific constraints** should be maintained under the rural development policy to prevent land abandonment and to ensure that the majority of remote areas are not left behind. They should also be included in the designated ring-fencing for the environmental and climate-related objectives.
- **Resource efficiency** plays an important role in successfully implementing the EU Climate Strategy through the agri-food and forestry sector's ability to better produce using less. In this context, **circular bio-economy should be supported to** provide new business models and opportunities for rural areas allowing them to improve their sustainability and to take the lead in terms of conversion and revalorisation of resources.

Social inclusion and preservation of rural communities

- Rural areas need to have a sharp focus on **generational renewal** to guarantee their viability in the long run. We need to allow young entrants to set up their activities in the agri-food, forestry and wildlife management sectors through providing **better access to land, credits and training**. The Coalition stresses the importance of improving tools to support young farmers in the CAP post-2020 through adequate funding. Setting-up and rural business start-up aid, as well as a range of measures, including cooperation and investment support, will pave the way towards a more attractive sector, tackling the demographic challenge faced by rural communities.
- **Rural actors** are indispensable to the viability of rural areas and must be taken into account in policy-making processes. Their **involvement** is crucial to developing **interventions tailored to local needs** – not only in the form of a bottom-up approach, but also reflecting local conditions. Therefore, their voices must be heard in collaborative decision-making, including in the context of the CAP networks.
- The investments in rural areas should focus on generating **added value for society** and meeting society's increasing demands. This will help rural actors to tackle current and future challenges which affect all citizens of the European Union equally.

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