

## Open Letter on Climate Action and Just Transition in Agriculture

Brussels, 11 December 2024

Dear Executive Vice-President Ribera Rodríguez and Commissioner Hoekstra,

Cc: Christophe Hansen, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, and Jessika Roswall, EU Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy

We are writing to you as a group of more than twenty civil society organisations to congratulate you on your new mandates in the European Commission. Within your mandate you will have the responsibility and opportunity to ensure the urgently needed just transition of our food systems based on ambitious climate action.

Multiple crises, including climate change and the loss of biodiversity, are forcing a transition of our food systems. This is not a distant scenario, but a current reality, as livelihoods and food security – both globally and in Europe – are coming under increasing pressure from extreme weather, land degradation, water availability issues, biodiversity collapse, and increased food prices.

**If we do not change our food systems, catastrophic climate change and biodiversity collapse will change them for us. A transition is inevitable, but making it just and sustainable requires action.**

"The time for change is now", [states](#) the consensus report of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture, acknowledging the massive challenge ahead of us and setting out first steps of a just transition for the sector. Equally, the European Economic and Social Committee [recognised](#) the importance of putting in motion a just transition "to ensure a sustainable future for EU agri-food systems."

To set the EU's agri-food sector on a just transition pathway, we recommend that you:

1. **Set a binding and ambitious sectoral gross emission reduction target compatible with the objective of the Paris Agreement and the EU Climate Law to create a pathway for the EU agri-food sector to contribute its share of emission reductions.** The European Commission's impact assessment on the 2040 climate target highlighted that swift and determined action in the agriculture sector is a critical piece of achieving our climate targets. The target should be met through real emission reductions and proven holistic solutions, such as agroecological and organic farming, that address wider biodiversity, water, health, and animal welfare issues and increase the system's resilience by truly transforming EU agriculture. As such, the pathway to meet this target must avoid resorting to technical climate fixes that do not address wider issues and lock us in further in business as usual, and carbon offsets, that further enable the status quo. Additionally, an EU-wide consumption-based emission

reduction target should be considered to account for emissions linked to EU consumption beyond its borders, complementing the 2040 territory-based climate targets.

2. **Develop a strategy on the future of animal farming in the EU**, as recommended by the Strategic Dialogue. The strategy must focus on the transition away from intensive livestock rearing, which is a significant source of EU agricultural emissions and environmental pollution, and build on the modernisation of animal welfare legislation. It must support farmers who already work with or transition to diverse and low-input pasture-based systems, coupled with a strong reduction in overall farm animal numbers. These systems can contribute positively to rural communities and local ecosystems, biodiversity, soil health, and animal welfare. The strategy must avoid the displacement of smaller producers in favour of large-scale operations.

The strategy also needs to address the consumption side to ensure that the transition to ecologically just and better animal rearing is matched by a corresponding dietary shift, and leakage effects are avoided. This can be done through the recommended Plant-Based Foods Action Plan, an EU Protein Strategy, and the revision of the public procurement directive towards sustainable food procurement.

Long-term predictability, as well as inclusive consultation processes will be key to create buy-in and trust from different stakeholders that are facing fundamental questions about the future of their livelihoods. The strategy should be developed in an iterative process with local strategies in high-density livestock areas, in line with the territorial approach recommended by the Strategic Dialogue consensus. It must address the role and responsibility of all actors in the supply chain to contribute their share in the transition.

3. **Outline a plan for the recommended Agri-Food Just Transition Fund and consider it in the discussions about the Multiannual Financial Framework.** Access to dedicated transition funding is a key barrier for farmers who want to significantly change their business model for better sustainability and resilience. This requires a fundamental reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to repurpose public funds for the transition and remunerate farmers proportionally to the ecosystem services they are providing according to a clear direction and timeline, and going beyond the requirements of environmental legislation. A temporary Agri-Food Just Transition Fund governed outside the CAP and specifically dedicated to de-risking the transition and supporting farming and food sector business transformation into long-term sustainable businesses within planetary boundaries, as recommended by the Strategic Dialogue, can help to accelerate the transition. This fund should support the transition to agroecology and higher animal welfare practices rather than further intensification. It must be transparent and developed in consultation with small-scale farmers to ensure that the fund is accessible and suitable for smaller farms and diversified agricultural systems.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss your strategies to fulfil your mandate on ensuring ambitious climate action and a clean, just, and competitive transition, through the agroecological transformation of our food systems.

President von der Leyen urged all Commissioners to 'hit the ground running'. There is no time to waste.

Kind regards,

