

ACTIVITY REPORT 2019-2024

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I. Introduction

My mandate, which started on 1 December 2019, came at a very difficult time: for the EU as a whole and for our farmers in particular.

In the early months of 2020, we were struck by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused huge disruptions to the whole food sector.

In 2021, European agriculture was hit by another crisis, linked to the sharp rise in energy and fertiliser costs, as a result of Russia's conscious actions preparing for the aggression against Ukraine. Fertiliser prices, especially nitrogen-based fertilisers, increased by 2-3 times.

In February 2022, Russia's illegal aggression against Ukraine started, with huge consequences for the agricultural sector. Russia, not for the first time, used food as a weapon, destabilising global markets, especially for wheat.

Throughout these years, climate disasters also increased. Farmers in many EU countries have been affected by dramatic floods, droughts, forest fires, sudden frosts and damages costing many billions of euros. Furthermore, European farmers have been and are still struggling with the consequences of outbreaks of animal diseases, such as avian influenza and African swine fever.

Despite these tremendous challenges, European farmers have overcome their difficulties and ensured food security for all. I believe that the actions outlined below played an important role in supporting our farmers in fulfilling this task – at a time when such support was needed the most.

I hope that this paper will account for the work undertaken by my services and I over the course of the mandate. I also hope that it will make a positive contribution to ongoing debates on the future direction of agriculture in the European Union. I welcome that there has been much attention and comment on this subject of late, most notably in the report of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture. From the outset, I would like to make clear that this paper does not intend to contradict or contest this report, but rather to complement its findings and recommendations with my own perspectives and proposals. Where there are commonalities, I hope the merit of the relevant points will be reinforced. Where there are differences, I hope they will be taken constructively.

Overall, I hope that this paper will be of some service to the co-legislators of the forthcoming mandate, to our farmers across Europe, and to all of us who depend on their work.



II. Key achievements of the mandate

1. The increase in EU agricultural funds for 2021-2027

In May 2020, at my initiative, the Commission proposed to increase the CAP budget by €26 billion (from €365 billion, initially planned, to €391 billion), and finally the July 2020 European Council adopted an increase of €22 billion (from €365 billion to €387 billion).

This increase in EU agricultural funds for 2021-2027 compared to the original 2018 proposal was a major achievement, of tangible financial benefit to EU farmers.

2. Rapid and effective crisis response during the pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic, many Member States unilaterally closed their borders for the protection of public health, despite the Commission's recommendation to adopt a coordinated approach to any restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods. Product transportation, particularly across borders, was challenging for the same reasons. Many food processing plants closed due to emergency measures or staff shortages. The hospitality industry was closed and there were shortages of staff and supply problems in supermarkets.

At that time, the Commission took many decisions and interventions to support farmers and the food sector to effectively overcome this crisis, for example, by opening green corridors for agricultural commodities, facilitation of border crossing of agricultural workers, market interventions, and by allowing the flexible transfer of agricultural funds to crisis-related purposes.

The European Court of Auditors, in its report 09/2023, assessed these actions positively:

"... The EU has put in place the following support measures in particular;

- publication of Commission guidelines to ensure an effective food supply chain in the EU, where seasonal workers have been identified as 'critical' workers to support the food sector;*
- direct support to farmers and SMEs in the form of lump sums (Rural Development Measure 21), loans and guarantees, higher advances and increased State aid under the Temporary Framework for farmers and food processing companies;*
- exceptional market measures in the form of aid for private storage, support for distillation of wine in a crisis situation and flexibility in the implementation of market support programmes;*
- CAP flexibility measures consisting of extending the deadline for submitting CAP payment claims and temporarily replacing on-the-spot checks on farms with alternative sources of evidence, such as satellite images or geotagged photos, to limit physical contact between farmers and inspectors..."*

"...The Court's auditors concluded that the Commission has generally taken appropriate action to address the threat to supply chains in the agricultural sector caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that the Commission took action quickly and that its measures helped to limit disruptions in the supply of agricultural products..."

3. Swift and strong response to support EU farmers impacted by Russia's war in Ukraine

Already in the first weeks of the war, the Commission took action. For example:

- The Emergency Aid Reserve was mobilised for an amount of €500 million to support farmers, including further support of €1.4 billion, including one-off lump sums of €15.000-100,000,
- market protection measures to support the pigmeat market in view of the particularly difficult situation in this sector,
- the Temporary Crisis Framework to support the economy allows Member States to establish grant schemes up to €250000 for enterprises active in the agricultural sector,
- an exceptional temporary derogation allowing crops on set-aside land in the EU while maintaining the full greening payment for farmers.

Of particular importance was the rapid authorisation of public emergency aid and the extension of this aid to farmers. Thanks to the integration of agriculture into the aid scheme, over the next 2 years, 22 countries provided a total of over €10 billion in public aid to farmers, helping the most vulnerable sectors and sectors to withstand the crisis.

4. Effective measures against the crisis of excessive agricultural imports from Ukraine

The reduction of excessive agricultural imports from Ukraine and the temporary ban (from 2 May to 15 September 2023) on imports of wheat, maize, rapeseed and sunflower from Ukraine to 5 border countries – was an important personal achievement. This ban (covering final imports and not limiting transit), introduced despite the initial opposition of as many as 20 EU countries, played an effective role in reducing excessive grain imports from Ukraine. This was the first such regional ban in the history of the EU's common market.

5. The successful political compromise on the reform of the CAP

Following intensive negotiations, the reform of 2021 was backed by 26 countries (only Bulgaria abstained) and was also supported by a large majority of the European Parliament.

From my point of view, the key elements of the CAP reform agreed in June 2021 are:

- greater flexibility of the CAP through the introduction of national strategic plans, which made it possible to better adapt the CAP to national circumstances,
- increased support for small and medium-sized farms, by a 10 % redistributive payment,
- the creation of a system of voluntary eco-schemes and financial incentives for agricultural practices beneficial for the environment and the climate,
- the integration of animal welfare into the eco-schemes and a 4-fold increase in animal welfare expenditure in the CAP, from around €1.5 billion to over €6 billion,
- a simplified control system for farmers and the transfer of the overall control to the national level.

I would like to mention that the 2021 CAP reform, unlike some other EU policies, reinforces the role of Member States by transferring to them the drafting of CAP Strategic Plans at national level and by fully transferring direct control of farmers to the national level.

6. Simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy, in response to farmers' concerns

A policy, especially at EU level, is often the result of complex compromises and negotiations. When we saw that farmers were facing difficulties after one year of implementation of the new CAP, in the context of unprecedented external pressures, it was important for us to change the policy to make it more pragmatic and fit to farming realities. I listened closely to the concerns expressed by farmers and EU countries and worked hard with my services in DG AGRI to deliver swift and concrete actions to respond to the issues raised.

Some of the key elements of this simplification included:

- following 4 % of agricultural land – first relaxed, from the proposed 10% to 4%, then for 3 consecutive years deferred and eventually abolished as a mandatory requirement and converted into a voluntary and payable eco-scheme for farmers,
- the crop rotation obligation – deferred and recently replaced by crop diversification,
- winter flexibilities – instead of rigid deadlines to be defined by Member States,
- Farms of up to 10 ha, i.e. about two thirds of farms in the EU have been exempted from checks on conditionality and any penalty for non-compliance with CAP conditions,
- Holdings of more than 10 ha less controls by 50 % and extension of the possibility to waive sanctions due to force majeure or exceptional circumstances,
- Exempting farmers from penalties for non-compliance with CAP conditions with retroactive effect from 1 January 2024.

7. Intensive and effective promotion of EU agricultural and food products.

During my mandate I carried out 7 promotional business missions: to Vietnam, Singapore, Japan, India, China, Kazakhstan, and Indonesia. The missions received a high level of interest and participation from farmers, agri-business representatives, and EU entrepreneurs. In particular, the political and business meetings undertaken during the missions contributed to greater market openings and facilitated direct trade contacts.

In a wider sense, the successful promotion of European food contributed to the EU reaching a record high export surplus in food trade in 2023, with over €70 billion (exports €228 billion, imports €158 billion). Given the significant excess of EU production over EU consumption for major agricultural products – such as cereals, meat, milk or wine – and taking into account the highest quality of Union agricultural products, promotion activities for agricultural and food products should be increased or at least maintained.

III. The current state of EU agriculture

The European Union remains a major agricultural producer and is the world's largest exporter of food. The value added of agricultural production in the EU-27 in 2022 was €222 billion, 44 % higher than in 2015. EU exports of agricultural and food products to third countries in 2022 amounted to €229 billion, €58 billion higher than their imports into the EU market. In 2023, the EU's export surplus of agricultural and food products with third countries increased to a record level of over €70 billion.

Despite the growing economic performance, the estimated **income** per unit of agricultural labour has been significantly lower for decades compared to income per unit of labour in non-agricultural sectors. A notable improvement occurred between 2019 and 2022, when agricultural incomes surpassed the barrier of 50% for the first time compared to non-agricultural ones, and even reached 65% in 2022. Unfortunately in 2023, as a result of the accumulation of adverse events on agricultural markets, they fell to 60%, but this is still significantly higher than in previous decades.

From a **social** perspective, the 2020 EU agricultural census points to several adverse developments between 2010-2020, including a decrease in the number of farms and an increase in the average age of EU farmers (referred to in further detail below). Our farm families are of vital importance to the European Union: they provide a diverse, productive, and resilient source of food, while also supporting the vibrancy and economic well-being of our rural communities. The trends identified in the census are therefore of major concern.

From an **environmental** perspective, progress continues in strengthening the sustainability of the EU agricultural sector. For example, since 1990, EU agriculture has lowered its greenhouse gas emissions by 23%, while increasing productivity. The most recent CAP reform supports our farmers in making further progress. From 2023 to 2027, close to €98 billion from the CAP (representing 32% of the total spending) will be devoted to delivering environmental and animal welfare benefits. Over 150 eco-schemes have been introduced by Member States in their CAP Strategic Plans. At EU level, these eco-schemes will cover around 110 million hectares, representing roughly 68% of total EU farmland.

Finally, an assessment of agriculture in the European Union cannot be complete without recognising the success of the sector in fulfilling its most important function: **maintaining food security**. This function underscores the strategic importance of agriculture, which is often overlooked. **Alongside defence and energy security, food security** is one of the main pillars of general security: for societies, states and for every human being. Without a well-functioning food system, the physical existence of human beings is at risk. European agriculture and our food system as a whole ensures food self-sufficiency for 460 million EU citizens. The Union remains self-sufficient in major agricultural products, such as cereals, meat, milk, vegetables and fruit. **As the world's largest food exporter**, the EU agricultural sector also ensures exports to third countries of food produced with the highest quality, health and environmental standards in the world.

In the coming years, the European Union is not threatened by food shortages. This is thanks to farmers and all food workers, but also to the Common Agricultural Policy, which has been successful in supporting European agriculture for more than 60 years. Over the course of 2023-2027, the EU will continue this support, contributing €307 million to agriculture, or more than €60 billion per year, under the Common Agricultural Policy.

However, **food security remains a strategic challenge** for societies and states, including for the European Union. This is confirmed in particular by the current crisis situation, which has lasted for more than 4 years, first linked to the largest pandemic in Europe in over 100 years, and then to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the largest attack on a sovereign European country since World War II, which reminded us of how food can be used as a weapon. The threat posed to farming and food security by climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation has also grown during this period.

In the European Union, the availability of food was maintained throughout this crisis period, but there was a notable impact on the affordability of food, with the rise in production costs and price inflation. From a global perspective, **food insecurity remains a fundamental challenge.** According to FAO data, 780 million people in the world are at risk of hunger and forecasts suggest that this number may be even higher.

Given the elemental and strategic importance of food security, we need to recognise and address the risks to our agricultural sector, which may result in a loss of this security in the future and which must be prevented in a timely manner.

Key trends & threats to address

(1) There is a rapid decline in the number of farms in the EU. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of farms decreased from 12 to 9 million, i.e., by roughly 25%. Based on these statistics, around 800 farms in the Union have disappeared each day. Not only the smallest and weakest farms have disappeared, but also high-commodity farms, e.g., The Netherlands, which is dominated by intensive and high-commodity farms, lost 27% of farms over the decade 2010-2020. As farms disappear, they increase their average surface area, which rose from 16 to 17.5 ha over the decade 2010-2020. At the same time, the number of the largest farms, over 100 ha, increased from 286 thousand to 328 thousand, and the area of land used by these largest farms increased from 76 to 82 million ha, which is already more than half of all agricultural land in the EU. France (102,000), Spain (55,000) and Germany (38,000) account for the highest number of farms above 100 ha. Of approximately 9 million farms in the EU in 2020, 7 million had no more than 10 ha of agricultural land. These farms accounted for only around 18 million ha (out of 157.4 million ha of all agricultural land in the EU).

(2) The rapid disappearance of mixed-production farms combining crop and animal production is unwelcome. Over the decade 2010-2020, the number of these farms decreased from 3.1 million to 1.8 million, i.e. by 42 %. The negative aspect of this phenomenon is that mixed-production farms, based on their own feed, producing natural fertilisers, are the most sustainable and resilient farming model, but we are losing these farms at a particularly rapid pace. Livestock farming also decreased over the decade from 122 to 113 million LSU, i.e. by 7 %, with mixed farms falling from 21.5 million to 14.9 million LSU, or 31 %.

(3) EU agricultural land is shrinking. The area of agricultural land in the EU has also decreased over the decade 2010-2020, from around 159 to 157.5 million hectares. This is only 1 % loss, but 1.5 million ha is more than, for example, all agricultural land in Belgium.

(4) There is a lack of generational renewal in agriculture. The average age of a farmer in the European Union between 2010 and 2020 rose from 55.5 to 57 years, and more than 3 million, or one third of EU farmers, are over 65 years old. However, the situation varies widely across Member States. This is certainly affected by the income situation in agriculture, as outlined above.

(5) European agriculture is under threat from climate change and increasingly frequent natural disasters, in particular droughts and floods. Looking only at the last 3 years 2021-2024, we have experienced severe droughts in many EU countries, including Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, forest fires in Portugal, Greece and Sweden, as well as floods in Germany, Belgium, Italy, Greece and Slovenia, as well as frosts, causing enormous damage to wine production of the French and fruit production in Poland, Czechia and Austria. The losses caused by these disasters accounted for tens of billions of euros. In an environmental context, the threat posed to farming and food security by biodiversity loss and soil degradation must also be noted.

Within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy, there is limited scope to support farmers affected by natural disasters. In 2023, the European Commission used the agricultural reserve for the first time to support farmers affected by drought and floods in Spain, Italy, Greece and Slovenia, and in 2024 the agricultural reserve was used to support farmers affected by frost in Poland, Czechia and Austria. Other possible and available resources were opened by flexibility in CAP Pillar II spending.

(6) Russia’s aggression against Ukraine remains a threat to European agriculture.

Russia uses food as a weapon and its actions have destabilised agricultural markets, mainly due to massive increases in energy and fertiliser prices (in 2022, fertiliser prices increased by 149 % compared to the previous year), and due to the destruction and blocking of Ukrainian seaports, causing and continuing to block Ukraine’s agricultural exports, including mainly grains to Asian and African markets. This war has also resulted in increased imports of agricultural goods from Ukraine. In 2022 alone, agricultural imports from Ukraine to the EU market increased from €7 billion to €13 billion, i.e. by around €6 billion, causing a shock to agricultural markets in some EU countries, especially those bordering Ukraine. The war triggered a visible ‘redirection’ of Ukraine’s agricultural exports, which were directed to African and Asian countries to more than 80 % before the war, while following Russia’s aggression and war blockade and destruction of Ukrainian ports, most of Ukraine’s agricultural exports (52 %) were directed to the European Union market in 2022.

The European Union organised support to Ukraine by allowing its agricultural goods to be exported over land through the Solidarity Lanes. Furthermore, since June 2022, Ukraine has benefited from the possibility of exporting its agricultural goods in the European Union free of duties and tariffs and without quantitative restrictions. However, the rapid influx of grain from Ukraine caused difficulties for a number of our farmers, in particular to “frontline” Member States. In response, the European Commission introduced a temporary ban on exports of certain products to these countries, twice mobilised support from the CAP agricultural reserve for a total amount of more than €156 million (with the possibility of 200 % of national co-financing), and enabled the possibility of national public aid for farmers affected by the war in Ukraine. These responses were crucial and effective. They also demonstrate the need for long-term strategic planning to protect our farmers in anticipation of Ukraine’s future membership of the EU.

(7) There is an economic threat in the over-reliance of individual agricultural sectors on external supplies. EU agriculture relies heavily on fertiliser imports. In November 2022, the European Commission presented a Communication on ensuring the availability and affordability of fertilisers. The Communication provided a series of actions and guidance on how to address the challenges that EU farmers and industry had been facing.

Of similar concern is the dependence of livestock farming on imports of protein feed. The EU produces 77 % of feed protein, but only 29 % of the high-protein raw materials needed to balance animal feed come from the EU.

IV. A vision for the future of European Agriculture

To address the trends and threats outlined above, I propose an **Agricultural Pact for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security**, based on the '4xS' principle:

- I. to strengthen food **security** and protect shrinking agricultural land resources;
- II. to reinforce the economic and legal **stability** of farmers;
- III. to promote **sustainable** agricultural production;
- IV. to ensure **solidarity** with farmers.

The Pact includes a set of 21 political commitments that contribute to the above principles, which I set out below.

An Agricultural Pact for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

1. To strengthen food security and protect shrinking agricultural land resources

1. A mandatory study on the impact of strategic and legislative initiatives on agriculture and food security

The development of agricultural policies, plans, programmes and regulations, as well as decisions on investments in rural areas that have an impact on agriculture, should always be preceded by an analysis of the impact of those policies, regulations or decisions on agriculture, in particular on agricultural conditions and on food security.

2. Protection of agricultural land

Non-agricultural investments in rural areas should be carried out in a way that does not interfere, or interferes as little as possible, with agricultural activity; the take-over of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes should be limited to absolute and particularly justified exceptions.

3. Guarantee of agricultural activity

No one may require the cessation or restriction of agricultural activities carried out in rural areas in accordance with the law and with the use of practices and facilities specific to a particular type of farming activity. However, if exceptional reasons make it necessary to cease or restrict certain agricultural activities carried out in accordance with existing law, this may occur only with the necessary adjustment period and with fair compensation to enable the farmer to take up other agricultural activity or to adapt his previous agricultural activity to the changed legal conditions.

4. Expropriation of agricultural land only with full compensation

The expropriation of the farmer from his land can only take place with fair compensation covering not only the value of the land lost, but also the costs of restoring the agricultural activity elsewhere, and the farmer should be given the opportunity to replace the land.

II. To reinforce the economic and legal stability of farmers

5. A Common Agricultural Policy with a reinforced budget

i) The Common Agricultural Policy should continue beyond 2027, with a reinforced budget, commensurate with the challenges and tasks faced by farmers, with a size of at least 0.5 % of the Union's GDP.

ii) The distribution of funds from Pillar I should be as follows:

- Basic income support – at most 35 %
- eco-schemes – at least 25 %
- redistributive payment for small and medium-sized farms – 10 %
- mixed farm payment – 10 %
- coupled payments – 10 %
- payment for protein crops – 5 %
- payment for young farmers – 5 %

iii) Not less than 10 % of the CAP budget should be ring-fenced as a separate pillar of the CAP and reserved for crisis aid instruments for farmers in situations of climate disasters, human and animal health risks, as well as economic and political crises. A possible restructuring could be:

Pillar 1: European Agricultural Income Guarantee Fund (EAIGF) – income support

Pillar 2: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) – rural development measures

Pillar 3: European Common Market Organisation Fund (ECMOF) – market measures + agricultural reserve

6. Strong incentives rather than heavy regulations

Any new responsibilities or tasks for the CAP or other policies should be imposed on farmers on the basis of financial incentives rather than legal compulsion. In particular, increasing farmers' efforts for the environment and climate should be financially compensated.

7. Moderate sanctions

The penalties imposed on farmers for irregularities found in agricultural activities should be measured in proportion to their seriousness and consequences, in order to ensure that minor irregularities, in particular irregularities not attributable to bad will, do not result in penalties in the form of the repayment of all or a large part of the funds received and do not lead to the need to cease or significantly reduce their agricultural activity.

8. Increased protection for leaseholders

CAP funds should have been allocated to genuine farmers and if the land is used by a tenant, the landowner should be entitled to raise CAP funds. Member States should review their legislation and, where necessary, introduce legislative amendments strengthening the protection of leaseholders and the sustainability of leases.

9. Support for small and medium-sized family farms

Support for small and medium-sized family farms should be strengthened. The redistributive payment for small and medium-sized farms should be provided at the level of at least 10 % of the national envelope for direct payments.

10. Supporting young farmers

Support for young farmers under both pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy should be strengthened, while removing administrative barriers to young farmers' access to the funds allocated to them. The status of "young farmer" should not only apply to the head of the holding, but also to co-managers within the family farm. At least 5 % of the national envelope of the CAP should be allocated to support for young farmers.

III. To promote sustainable agricultural production

11. Support for farms with mixed crop and animal production

Support for mixed farms, combining crop and animal production in a balanced manner, should be introduced as direct payments, using feed mainly derived from their own crop production. At least 10 % of the national envelope for direct payments should be allocated to support for such farms.

12. Supporting carbon farming

In particular under the eco-schemes of Pillar I of the CAP, practices beneficial for the climate, the environment and soil health in so-called "carbon farming", favouring soil carbon conservation and improving water relations, such as the use of manure, the mixing of straw and soil, catch crops, the use of zero-tillage, crop rotation or crop diversification, should be supported,

13. Supporting livestock farming with animal welfare

Stronger support should be provided to livestock farms for the voluntary improvement of animal welfare standards such as building surface increase, summer grazing, free range, tethering or littering, including for welfare investments. Support for animal welfare should be possible both as an eco-scheme for direct payments and as an environmental measure under Pillar II of the CAP.

14. Promoting the cultivation of protein crops

Support should be provided for farms producing protein crops, for which Member States should allocate at least 5 % of their national envelopes to direct payments.

15. Supporting organic farms

Support should be given to the development of organic farms and organic production, while allowing organic production to be carried out both on the whole of the holding and on a separate part of it, and ensuring that these farms can be supported under both direct payments and rural development.

IV. To ensure solidarity with farmers

16. Fair prices for farmers for agricultural products

The Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UTP) should be strengthened, in particular by requiring written contracts, setting up a system for monitoring prices and margins and prohibiting paying farmers prices below production costs.

17. Supporting cooperatives and other forms of cooperation between farmers

The establishment of agricultural cooperatives, producer groups and other voluntary associations of agricultural holdings should be supported, also with the help of CAP and other EU funds, in order to strengthen their resilience and economic capacity, and participation in such a voluntary association must not lead to the deprivation or reduction of individual farm management rights.

18. Promotion of direct sales

The right of farmers to be free of taxes and other charges on direct sales and to process agricultural products derived from agricultural activities on their agricultural holdings should be ensured and the competent authorities should ensure that there are places available to farmers for the direct sale of agricultural products, in particular products from agricultural holdings operating on their territory.

19. On-farm consumption of livestock

It is appropriate to provide for the possibility of keeping a small number of farmed animals for personal use, without requiring the registration of those animals, unless such a requirement proves necessary to combat animal diseases.

20. Neighbouring assistance

It is appropriate to introduce the principle that a farmer may provide, whether in return for payment or free of charge, neighbouring aid on another agricultural holding, either in the form of self-employment or with the use of machinery and tools belonging to his holding, whereby work carried out as part of his own agricultural activity is treated as work carried out in the context of his own agricultural activity,

21. European Farmers' Ombudsman

A European Farmers' Ombudsman should be appointed to defend farmers' rights vis-à-vis public authorities and dominant economic operators, operating in a legal form similar to the current Ombudsman for Small and Medium-sized Entrepreneurs. Member States should establish the institutions of the Farmers' Ombudsman at national level.

V. Conclusion

Although my mandate was dominated by crises, I believe it was defined by responses. Many of the most important responses are set out above. But this list is not exhaustive. And furthermore, the mandate was not only reactive, but proactive. In addition to the actions recalled above, it is worth adding a number of other notable achievements, such as:

- adopting the strategic document: “**A long-term vision for rural areas by 2040**”,
- developing and adopting a strategic document “**Action Plan for the Development of Organic Farming**”,
- adopting legislative amendments facilitating the registration of products with **geographical indications** and strengthening the protection of geographical indications in agreements with third countries,
- creating an **EU Observatory on Costs and Margins** in the agricultural sector, with a view to increasing the transparency of agricultural markets and strengthening the position of farmers in the supply chain,
- effectively supporting farmers with the **agricultural reserve**, in the light of the market crises caused by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the climate catastrophes,
- achieving significant **improvements in the regularity of CAP expenditure**, according to the European Court of Auditors, the level of errors in this expenditure has decreased to a level below the materiality threshold of 2 %.

I am proud of these achievements, but I am also grateful for the cooperation I received during my time in office, without which these achievements would not have been possible.

I warmly thank my services in the **European Commission**, as well as the political partners: the Members of the **European Parliament** and the members of the **Council**, the Ministers of Agriculture of the Member States, the successive Presidencies – Finnish, Croatian, German, Portuguese, Slovenian, French, Czech, Swedish, Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian – for their intensive, constructive and fruitful cooperation over 5 years. I would like to further acknowledge the **European Committee of the Regions** and the **European Economic and Social Committee** for their input and involvement.

I am grateful to all social partners, including in particular the **European agricultural organisations**, as well as all those who shared opinions – sometimes critical, but always inspiring – with the Commission during my mandate. I also thank the **media**, especially journalists and publicists specialising in agricultural affairs, for their close interest and for keeping the public informed about the Commission’s work on agriculture.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank the **farmers of the European Union**. During my mandate, I was lucky to meet with farmers from all Member States and backgrounds – indeed, I made it a priority to visit farmers during my missions to EU countries. These engagements were always important and enlightening, even when – in fact, especially when – points of criticism or disagreement were raised.

Indeed, I am grateful for the protests of farmers, especially those in 2023-24, which had a significant impact on many changes in agricultural policy, in particular for the simplification of the agricultural policy carried out in 2024.

Most of all, in these difficult times, I am grateful that **there was no shortage of food anywhere in Europe**. For this, farmers and all workers in the food sector deserve great thanks, which I have expressed to them many times, and I now express once again.

Serving as European Commissioner has been a great honour, but also a great challenge, corresponding as it did with a series of significant global crises. Nevertheless, it was a privilege to be in my position, with the responsibility and resources to **support our farmers and our food system**. I am also aware that my challenges were minor compared to those of our farmers, whose courage and commitment throughout the past years has been inspirational.

In the challenges of the past five years, I believe that we have all been given an opportunity to learn. And considering the challenges that may come in the years ahead, we cannot afford to let this opportunity slip.

As a society, we must re-appraise how we value our **food**, the **land** from which it is produced, and the **people** who work to produce it.

Farmers, with the support of the CAP, have demonstrated their value time and time again by feeding Europe throughout the last 60 years. This value was reinforced once again during the challenges and crises of the past five years.

It was this value that **Professor Walter Hallstein** referred to over 60 years ago, when he justified the establishment of the Common Agricultural Policy:

“we know what the agricultural community means to Europe, not only from an economic point of view, but morally, socially and in human terms... as modern society develops it is essential that the farmer and his family, with their independence and their human values, should be enabled to survive.”

It was in this spirit that the CAP was established as a **fundamental pillar of the European Union**; and it is in this spirit that the CAP, and our Union, must continue.

Annex

I. Timeline of mandate

2020

25 March 2020

The Commission adopts a first package of measures to support farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the extension of the deadline for CAP payment applications, increased state aid, and the establishment of green lanes.

4 May 2020

The Commission publishes a second package of exceptional measures to further support the most affected agricultural and food markets. The measures include private storage aid for the dairy and meat sectors, the temporary authorisation to self-organise market measures by operators in hard hit sectors, and flexibility in the implementation of market support programmes. On top of these market measures, the Commission proposed to allow Member States to use rural development funds to compensate farmers and small agri-food businesses with amounts of up to €5,000 and €50,000, respectively.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** at the **AGRIFISH council meeting of 13 May 2020:**

“Together we have ensured that a health crisis did not evolve in a food crisis. We can be proud that the food chain has successfully kept safe, high quality and affordable food on our citizens’ tables... The COVID-19 crisis has made us all more aware of the importance of food security and the need to help and to stand by our farmers, who experience a very severe crisis, which in some cases threatens the survival of their business... A great deal remains to be done. There is a huge challenge ahead of us in repairing the human cost and the damage to our economies. With continued hard work, commitment and cooperation we can and will succeed... I will continue to do everything in my power to support farmers, their income and their ability to guarantee our food security.”

2 June 2020

The Commission accepts Commissioner Wojciechowski’s request to increase the CAP budget for 2021-2027 by €26 billion.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“The revised proposal for the MFF 2021-2027 substantially reinforces the CAP funding. In total, €391 billion is proposed for agriculture and rural development.. It is 2 % higher than 2020 funding levels. Which means that the sector will receive 2 % more funds each year than it received in 2020. The farmers will appreciate being given the resources to continue producing our food in a more sustainable way, especially in these difficult times.”*

7 July 2020

The Commission adopts an additional package of emergency measures to support the wine and fruit & vegetable sectors in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis. The exceptional measures include a temporary derogation from EU competition rules, an increase in the EU contribution to national support programmes, and permission to pre-finance crisis distillation and storage.

14 September 2020

EU and China sign landmark agreement protecting Geographical Indications. The agreement protects 100 European GIs in China and 100 Chinese GIs in the EU from counterfeiting and misappropriation.

27 November 2020

Political agreement on the transitional provisions for the CAP

A political agreement is reached between the Parliament, the Commission and the Council on the transitional provisions for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period 2021-2022. This 2-year transitional period gives farmers and Member States more time to prepare for a full reform of the CAP.



15 December 2020

EU Agricultural Outlook conference, 15-16 December 2020

Commissioner Wojciechowski expresses his gratitude to farmers and food workers for their efforts and their contribution to ensuring food security during the pandemic.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *"...dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us in an enormous way and of course it has affected European agriculture. I have to give a big thanks to you: to our farmers and those employed in the broad agri-food sector for having ensured our food security during this difficult time – a task that also required active support from the European Commission. The Commission introduced measures supporting farmers and the agri-food sector in the context of the crisis. The guidelines facilitated the movement of agricultural products and seasonal workers at a crucial time and kept borders open.*

2021

24 March 2021

The Commission publishes an action plan for the development of organic production. Its overall goal is to achieve 25 % of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030, as well as to increase organic aquaculture significantly. The Action Plan is designed to provide the already fast growing organic sector the right tools to achieve the 25 % target. To ensure sustainable growth in this sector, the Action Plan sets out 23 actions, based on three strands: boosting consumption, increasing production and further improving the sustainability of the sector.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“To achieve the 25% of organic farming target, we need to ensure that demand drives the growth of the sector while taking into account the significant differences between each Member State's organic sectors. The organic Action Plan provides tools and ideas to accompany a balanced growth of the sector. The development will be supported by the Common Agricultural Policy, research and innovation as well as close cooperation with key actors at EU, national and local level.”*

25 June 2021

A provisional political agreement is negotiated on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The agreement paves the way for a fairer, greener, more flexible policy, including the introduction of national strategic plans, eco-scheme payments to incentivise voluntary environmental and animal welfare actions, and the redistribution of support to small farms and young farmers.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“I am glad that we have reached a political agreement on a new CAP in time for its implementation by the beginning of 2023. The new CAP combines higher environmental, climate and animal welfare ambitions with a fairer distribution of payments, especially to small and medium-sized family farms as well as young farmers. I now count on Member States to develop ambitious CAP strategic plans that are in line with our objectives, and that will provide the right tools to support our farmers in the transition to a sustainable food system.”*

30 June 2021

The European Commission presents a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas. Among the key initiatives in the Vision are a Rural Pact, to facilitate cooperation between rural actors at EU, national, regional and local levels, and a Rural Action Plan, a set of 30 actions targeting stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas is a first step towards transforming our rural areas. The new CAP will contribute to the Vision by fostering a smart, resilient and diversified agricultural sector, bolstering environmental care and climate action and strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.”*

23 September 2021

Launch of the annual “EU Organic Day”. All three EU institutions (Parliament, Commission and Council) sign a joint declaration declaring 23 September as EU organic day.



23 November 2021

The European Parliament adopts the CAP reform by a large majority.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“Today, the European Parliament voted for a fairer policy; not only for small and medium-sized family farmers, but also for young farmers and farm workers. I will personally ensure that small and medium-sized family farms are not excluded from any intervention or assistance. These farms make up the vast majority of farms in Europe, and they provide us with the vast majority of our food – they support us, so we must support them.”*

2 December 2021

Following the positive vote of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union adopts the CAP reform.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“This new CAP will be fairer, providing additional mandatory support to young farmers and smaller farms. This new CAP will be greener, with increased ambition for climate, environment, and animal welfare. This new CAP will be more flexible. Member States are required to explain in their strategic plans how they will make use of the CAP, in accordance with their local conditions and needs... This reform is a unique opportunity to show that we can work together towards a more sustainable agriculture while preserving food security and a good livelihood for our rural and farming communities.”*

2022

23 March 2022

The European Commission presents a range of short, medium and long-term actions to support Ukraine, enhance global food security and protect farmers and consumers in the EU in light of rising food prices and input costs. Actions to support EU farmers include a €500 million support package, extended state aid, advances for direct payments, temporary derogations and flexibilities on EU regulations, and the establishment of the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM).

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said:

“In recent days, I have spoken with Ministers from the Ukrainian government, who have described the situation facing their farmers. They have spoken of destroyed land, of lost crops and livestock. I also spoke with Deputy Minister Taras Dzoba, who said that Russia is taking Ukrainian soil and using it “as a weapon”. A weapon against its own people; a weapon of starvation.



In the face of this weapon, the European Union will not stand down. We will step up, we will defend our neighbours, defend the international community, and defend ourselves..

Today, we have adopted the Communication on “Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems”. The communication sets out actions in three areas:

- First, it presents our immediate actions to safeguard food security in Ukraine and around the world.*
- Second, we have addressed the challenge of stability in the EU's food system, with a range of measures to support our farmers and maintain affordability for our citizens.*
- Finally, we confirm our agenda to make our food system more sustainable and resilient in the years to come.*

Security, stability, and sustainability. These are the words that define our response.”

20 May 2022

The European Commission presents a proposal for an exceptional measure financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) allowing Member States to pay a lump sum to farmers and agri-food businesses affected by increases in input costs.

17 June 2022

Success at the 12th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Geneva.

Members agreed on a significant multilateral Agreement to end harmful fisheries subsidies, on specific next steps toward WTO reform, a Declaration on pandemic response and future preparedness, as well as a waiver of certain intellectual property obligations concerning COVID-19 vaccines. In a joint response to the current dramatic food situation resulting from Russia's aggression against Ukraine, WTO members agreed to exercise restraint on export restrictions and to exempt the World Food Programme humanitarian purchases from such restrictions.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“The adoption of the Declaration on Food Security and the Decision in support of the World Food Programme show that the WTO is able to respond quickly to current challenges. This multilateral declaration carries a strong message to the world.”*

July 2022

High-level mission to Vietnam and Singapore, with the participation of dozens of EU farmers and agribusiness representatives.

9 November 2022

The Commission publishes a Communication to address the availability and affordability of fertilisers in the EU and globally, outlining several best practices and ways ahead to help farmers optimise their fertiliser use and reduce their dependencies, while securing yields.

14 December 2022

European Commission approves all 28 strategic plans (one for each EU country and two for Belgium), paving the way for the start of the new Common Agricultural Policy and the delivery of €307 billion to support EU farmers and rural communities from 1 January 2023.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“Over the past number of years, we have worked closely together to devise good strategies. Now it is time to start implementing them. The new CAP will make the EU better prepared to address the challenges that our agricultural sector and farmers are facing today in the economic, environmental, and social fields. Our key objective of contributing to food security is preserved. We also maintain a level-playing field, while addressing the specific needs and situations at national and regional level.”*

2023

24 January 2023

The Commission presents a New Deal for Pollinators, setting out actions to be taken by the EU and Member States to reverse the decline of pollinators by 2030.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“Farmers experience first-hand the impact of climate change and the loss of biodiversity. We know that the decline of pollinators is a direct risk for agricultural productivity. There cannot be long-term food security without greater sustainability. I acknowledge and praise the daily hard work from farmers that strive to feed us while complying with the most ambitious environmental requirements in the world. CAP Strategic Plans will support them in their transition to greener practices.”*

19 April 2023

The Commission takes action to more closely manage grain imports from Ukraine.

Following a meeting between EC Vice-President Dombrovskis, Commissioner Wojciechowski, and agriculture ministers of countries affected by excessive imports from Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria), the Commission introduces a ban on imports from Ukraine of four types of grain (wheat, maize, rapeseed and sunflower) into these countries from 2 May to 15 September 2023, a decision that helps to reduce the destabilisation of agricultural markets.

4 May 2023

At the 2023 State of the Union conference of the European Institute University, Florence, Commissioner Wojciechowski presents his ‘4 x S’ principle for the future of EU agriculture.

From the speech **“Four Cornerstones for the Future of Food and Farming in the EU”**:

*“For the task of building Europe in times of uncertainty, I have presented four cornerstones, based on **four fundamental truths**:*

- *Society depends on food; we must therefore ensure **food security**.*
- *Food depends on farmers; we must therefore ensure the **stability** and economic viability of our farming communities.*
- *Farmers depend on the environment; we must therefore ensure the **sustainability** of our food systems.*
- *And finally, we all depend on each other; we must therefore ensure **solidarity**, especially in difficult times.*

*By building on these four cornerstones, I believe that we can reinforce the foundations of the European Union, laid down in the Treaty of Rome over 60 years ago. Because this much is clear: the **State of our Union depends on the state of our food system, and the future of European agriculture is the future of Europe itself.**”*

July 2023

High-level mission to Japan, with the participation of a large group of EU farmers and agribusiness representatives, aimed to promote EU food in the Japanese market.



17 November 2023

The Commission announces budget of €186 million to promote agri-food products in 2024.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“Our promotion campaigns open new opportunities for our agri-food sector, strengthening its essential contribution to the EU economy, especially in rural areas and remote regions. I welcome the focus on raising awareness of the EU organic logo and EU quality schemes – driving market demand in these areas is crucial.”*

23 November 2023

The Commission grants €51 million of aid from the crisis reserve to farmers affected by floods in Greece and Slovenia.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“We have proposed to mobilise the agricultural reserve to express our solidarity to Greek and Slovenian farmers who have suffered from catastrophic events. As the magnitude and frequency of crises are increasing, we also need to better use the resources available in the CAP plans to reinforce farmers' resilience, from risk management tools to investments, knowledge transfer and cooperation.”*

December 2023

High-level mission to India, with the participation of farmers' representatives in the EU agribusiness, aimed to promote EU food on the large Indian market.

2024

31 January 2024

The Commission proposes to allow EU farmers to derogate for one year from certain agricultural rules.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“In proposing this temporary derogation, the Commission demonstrates flexibility and solidarity with European farmers in the face of exceptional difficulties. By enabling the production of nitrogen fixing crops and catch crops, without the use of plant protection products, this derogation strikes a balance between the short-term necessity of supporting farmers and the long-term need to protect our climate, soil health, and biodiversity.”*



15 March 2024

The European Commission presents a package of solutions to simplify the Common Agricultural Policy and reinforce fairness in the supply chain, responding to the demands raised in the agricultural protests. The package introduces specific and targeted flexibility mechanisms to ensure that our farmers can protect the environment and maintain production in the most effective way. The package is approved by the European Parliament on 24 April.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“Today’s proposals mark another strong step in the Commission’s response to reduce administrative burdens for farmers and reinforce fairness in the food supply chain. The proposals embrace a pragmatic and targeted approach to enable the good work of our farmers and provide increased flexibility for Member States to achieve CAP objectives. Our work over the coming weeks and months is crucial, to ensure that the full potential of these proposals benefit farmers on the ground.”*

27 March 2024

The European Commission publishes a report outlining the progress made under the EU's Long-term Vision for Rural Areas, highlighting positive outcomes delivered since 2021. All 30 actions in the Rural Action plan have been launched – 9 are already completed.

April 2024

High-level mission to China, with representatives of EU farmers and agricultural business, to promote EU food and increase the opening of the large Chinese market to EU agricultural goods.

May 2024

High-level mission to Kazakhstan, with representatives of European farmers and agricultural business.

9 July 2024

The Commission mobilises €77 million in public aid for farmers affected by frost in the fruit, vegetables and wine sectors in Austria, Czechia and Poland, as well as Portuguese wine producers who are facing serious market disturbances. These countries can complement this EU support by up to 200 % with national funding.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“I strongly welcome these allocations, which ensure much-needed support to farmers in need... Support from the agricultural reserve was essential last year, when the Commission came to the aid of farmers in Greece, Slovenia, Italy and Spain. It is essential again this year, and will remain so in the future. The stability of our farmers is vital for the stability of our society – we must remember this principle now, and reinforce it in years to come.”*

17 July 2024

The EU Supply Chain Observatory is launched.

Commissioner **Wojciechowski** said: *“With this new Observatory, we gather operators from across the supply chain around the same table, alongside the Commission and public authorities, to engage in an open, transparent, and trust-worthy manner... Ultimately, the Observatory will aim to build trust between all actors in the agri-food supply chain – with each other and with the public authorities – and ensure that every actor is fairly remunerated for their work, for the benefit of all economic operators, consumers, and the public at large.”*

28 October 2024

Agri-food business mission to Indonesia, with a delegation of 12 prominent EU agri-food businesses from eight countries.