

Dear Ministers,

Thank you very much for the invitation to address this Informal Agricultural Council meeting.

I represent the European Environmental Bureau, which is a network of environmental citizens' organisations in Europe. We have 150 member organisations from all EU Member States, and represent 30 million European citizens. We stand for sustainable development, environmental justice and participatory democracy.

As environmental stakeholders, we have important expertise and should be fully involved in drafting CAP Strategic Plans and monitoring their implementation. That is the only way to have a Common Agricultural Policy that truly delivers on its environmental, social, and economic objectives with citizen support. I want to encourage you to keep engaging with environmental stakeholders, like you do today.

We are glad to see soil carbon sequestration on today's agenda, just days after global climate marches and the UN Climate Action Summit. Our farmers have everything to gain from increasing their soils' carbon content: besides helping to solve the climate crisis, this will make for healthier soils, and by consequence more productive and resilient agriculture.

It is encouraging to hear of local or national initiatives, such as the ones presented in our hosts' briefing paper, but what we really need is systemic action across the EU to address the climate emergency, with the CAP at its core. It must help EU farmers in delivering solutions to the environmental crises of our time and honour your citizens' demands.

This means, first, that half of the CAP budget should be dedicated to incentivising and rewarding farmers to adopt farming practices which benefit the environment, wildlife, and the climate. As an example, every EU country should set targets for increasing their soil organic carbon content.

Secondly, the CAP must also stop funding harmful practices and agricultural models. Unsustainable land management practices are causing widespread soil degradation and desertification. The run-off of nutrients causes pollution of rivers, lakes and even the whole Baltic Sea basin. The use of pesticides threatens crucial ecosystem services, such as pollination. EU factory farming is fuelling land degradation in the EU and abroad to provide livestock feed. The CAP must help farmers transition to extensive, mixed and circular farming models for the long-term sustainability of their sector.

Thirdly, public money should only be distributed to farmers who respect conditionality, and we need the rules set at EU level for a level playing field.

Finally, in light of the destructive fires in the Amazon forest, we urge you to support the preparation of new legislation that would ensure that companies and the finance sector follow due diligence to guarantee that products placed on the EU market and investments have not led to recent forest degradation or deforestation or caused human rights abuses.

To sum up, I hope you agree with us and will negotiate a new CAP that drives a transition to agroecological farming across the EU, in order to benefit rural economies, nature and climate. There is so much to gain for EU farmers and citizens from a new CAP which delivers the necessary systemic change, and conversely, so much to lose from business as usual. A European Green Deal has been promised; let's put a sustainable CAP at the centre of this transformative agenda.

Thank you for your attention. I hope you have constructive and solution-bound talks here in Helsinki.

*Jouni Nissinen, President of the European Environmental Bureau*