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How a fair EU agri-food policy can help create jobs in rural areas

A blog from our food campaign

How effective is European support for farming and agriculture? Well, the numbers speak for themselves: rural economies are in bad shape.

Between 2005 and 2010, 2.5 million farms were lost in the EU, with the average farm size increasing. Between 2000 and 2012, European agriculture lost 4.8 million jobs. Small farms tend to be more labour intensive with 53% of the workforce working on small sized farms.

In other words, a handful of super-industrialised farms - heavily dependent on chemical inputs monocultures and imported soya for the livestock sector - rule the game. As a consequence, farming suffers from a corresponding reduction in agricultural labour, which results in lower rural employment.

This situation raised concerns in the European Parliament, which has looked at the potential of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to improve job creation in rural areas. The report covering this matter was voted on Thursday 26th October.

Greens managed to significantly improve this EP initiative by bringing in broader perspectives on the effectiveness and fairness of the existing CAP in terms of job creation.

Thanks to the Green MEPs, the text insists on the failure of the current CAP to properly redistribute payments to small farmers: at the moment, the 13% richest beneficiaries receive 74% of CAP payments. For the Greens, CAP direct payments should only go to people whose main activity is agriculture, and not just landowners. We also need incentives for farmers to diversify income streams (for example through renewable energy and eco-tourism) and support small and diverse farm structures, more resilient to crises and better benefiting local communities.

Green MEPs also called for binding rules on fair payment in the food supply chain to make sure that farmers receive an adequate share. We also highlighted the potential of sustainable farming and food systems, especially organic farming, to create decent employment and encourage people to live and work in the countryside.

Finally, Green MEPs pushed for a clear statement that trade agreements like TTIP, CETA and MERCOSUR pose a significant threat to EU agricultural and employment markets, and pointed out that free-trade agreements should not lead to unfair competition for small farms, nor undermine local

economies.) Unfortunately all language critical of real threat of TTIP was deleted following the vote. However, and although we regret that, the report remains noteworthy for the CAP reform ahead.

MEP **Bronis Ropė**, who was the Greens' spokesperson on this report, underlines the main objectives we need to achieve in order to improve job potential in rural areas:

"Rural Europe today faces multiple challenges, due to a worldwide overproduction crisis, and as a result of mistakes made in regulation of the agricultural sector.. The reviewed and future CAP must focus on sustainable agriculture, satisfying the demand of Europeans for safe and healthy food, preservation of the natural environment, and generating means for sustainable development,.

"The future CAP must also look at the key task of developing structural measures, protecting producers from the paramount challenge of today: farmers being squeezed between low prices for their products and higher production costs, often due to input dependency, while also having to cope with market and climatic volatility. Ensuring sustainable development of rural areas, which produce quality and high added value products, is a key factor to create more quality jobs.. Furthermore, the aim of even distribution of sustainable development of European rural areas will remain heavily compromised if current differences in the level of direct payments are maintained."

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Responsible MEPs



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