



STRONG, SOVEREIGN, COMPETITIVE

THE ECR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE



**EUROPEAN
CONSERVATIVES
AND REFORMISTS**

April 2025

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INTRODUCTION

European agriculture has always been a fundamental pillar for the economy, food security, and environmental sustainability of our continent.

However, today we are facing unprecedented challenges, ranging from the rising costs of production, the global geopolitical crisis that impact on supply chains, the increasing regulatory pressure, especially as a result of the Green Deal, extreme weather events, the exodus of young people from agriculture and the difficulties of generational renewal on European farms due to the low incomes, the changing consumption habits, and, finally, the unfair competition of imported products from third countries.

In this context, last February 19th, the European Commission approved the “Vision for Agriculture and Food” presented by Commissioner Christophe Hansen.

This document represents our ECR contribution to this debate, a political basis for our work in the AGRI Committee and in all the other parliamentary bodies involved in agri-food related matters.

This work is born from the constant dialogue with the main stakeholders of the sector, focusing on the needs of European farmers and rural communities.

Our ECR Vision for the future of European agriculture aims at shifting the current paradigm considering the farmer as a threat to nature to create a new perception of rural workers as guardians of nature and proactive players for a positive change.

It emphasizes **defending the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, establishing financial protections for farmers, and **promoting European products globally**. To enhance competitiveness, the focus is on addressing market challenges, ensuring **food sovereignty**, and strengthening fair trade practices. It also advocates for a **strong reserve crisis mechanism** to support farmers in the face of adverse events.

Socially, it stresses support for rural areas, generational renewal in farming and **fair incomes for farmers**.

Additionally, **it opposes misleading health labels targeting the products of our traditional diets and the proliferation of lab-grown cellular meats.**

It stresses the **need for innovation**: digitalization, AI, IoT, and blockchain can improve efficiency, transparency, and sustainability in farming as well as **precision farming**, ag-tech incubators, and **new genomic techniques** (NGTs), ensuring European agriculture remains competitive.

It recalls the will to defend the European livestock sector and wine producers.



Our vision for the future of European agriculture is based on the need to combine tradition and innovation, promoting a sector that is not only productive, but also resilient, sustainable, and fair. The future of European agriculture depends on the ability to respond to the challenges of the present with solutions that combine innovation, sustainability, and social justice.

The agriculture of the future must be seen as a dynamic sector, capable of adapting quickly to change and meeting the food needs of the world's growing population. Only through a common commitment, involving institutions, farmers, researchers, and citizens, will we be able to build a European agriculture that is truly ready to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Strong: as the budget provisions and CAP rules we want to achieve; as the roots of European food tradition and culture; as our quality products recognised and appreciated worldwide.

Sovereign: as our food production needs to be in these challenging times of unstable supply chains and hybrid threats; as our producers asking for fair trade.

Competitive: as our companies we want to support in facing the global markets; as the farmers we want to free from ideological green and bureaucratic burdens; as the pioneers looking to field innovation.

Strong, sovereign and competitive is the agricultural Europe we want to build on. Founded on the solid basis of our farmers' heritage and on the values of our civilization.



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1. THE FARMER AS GUARDIAN OF NATURE

In the past years, farmers have been the subject of an unprecedented ideological attack that has demonised their work and their essence as enemies of environment and sustainability.

This outrageous drift generated regulatory choices that have significantly weakened and penalised the sector.

A new vision for European agriculture cannot be dispensed with a radical paradigm shift. In our view, farmers are the guardians of Europe's rural landscapes, preserving natural beauty, cultural traditions, and ecosystems. **Recognizing their role as custodians of the land ensures continued investment in sustainable and traditional farming practices.**

Farmers play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Incentivizing agro-ecological practices and responsible land stewardship ensures that farming contributes to environmental conservation rather than degradation.

Collaboration between farmers and institutions can develop innovative solutions that balance productivity with environmental sustainability, preserving natural landscapes for future generations. Encouraging family farming and land stewardship traditions ensures that knowledge and sustainable practices are passed down, preserving agricultural heritage while adapting to modern challenges.

Another central element of our vision for the future of agriculture is the creation of a more inclusive agricultural system.

To attract younger generations to farming, it is crucial to present agriculture as a dynamic, innovative, and rewarding career. **This can be achieved by integrating agricultural education into school curricula, offering apprenticeships, and highlighting success stories of young farmers who have embraced technology and sustainable practices.**

Furthermore, recognizing the diversity of agricultural needs across Europe is essential. Tailored support programs should consider the unique characteristics of different regions, from Mediterranean olive groves and vineyards to Scandinavian dairy farms. **This approach ensures that policies and initiatives are relevant and effective, fostering resilience and prosperity in all rural areas.**



2. A STRONG, AUTONOMOUS, TAILORED AND SIMPLIFIED CAP

During the Stresa Conference in 1958, the Ministers of Agriculture of the six founding Member States defined the fundamental basis of the upcoming Common Agricultural Policy.

These principles were adopted in Article 39 of the TFEU, that assigns to CAP the role to increase agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress and ensuring the optimum use of the factors of production, in particular labour; to ensure a fair standard of living for farmers; to stabilise markets; to ensure the availability of supplies, and to ensure reasonable prices for consumers.

Today, keeping agriculture financially independent safeguards Europe's food production and guarantees farmers the resources they need to thrive.

The CAP plays a vital role in ensuring the stability and sustainability of European agriculture. Maintaining its current structure, with direct payments to farmers, is crucial for providing predictable income support.

The specific needs of farmers demand dedicated funding mechanisms. Proposals to merge CAP with Cohesion Funds into a single fund risk diluting the targeted support that agriculture requires, **undermining the effectiveness of agricultural support and threatening the livelihood of European farmers.**

In particular, direct payments are essential for safeguarding farmers against market volatility, ensuring food security and promoting sustainable farming practices. They provide a financial safety net that enables farmers to **invest in innovation, maintain rural vitality, and meet environmental goals without compromising their economic viability.**

While fighting for a consistent CAP budget, we want to bring on our commitment for its simplification.

Farmers in fact face excessive bureaucratic requirements that hinder productivity and innovation. Simplifying application processes for subsidies, reducing paperwork and streamlining regulatory compliance will allow farmers to focus on production and sustainability rather than administrative tasks.

We've been strongly supporting the CAP simplification measures adopted by the Commission driven by the farmers' protest in February 2024. This step forward has to be brought on without delays. We will be closely following the work on the simplification packages for agriculture announced in the EU Vision for Food and Agriculture.

In the meantime we need a more tailored CAP.

On one hand are firmly opposed to making agricultural payments dependent on the achievement of any objectives other than those defined for agriculture in the TFEU. **In particular, we think that green measures have to be excluded from the first pillar schemes.**

On the other hand, **supporting real farmers** - those who actively cultivate the land and contribute to food production - is essential for the long-term sustainability of European agriculture. Economic aid should be directed towards genuine farmers to ensure that funds reach those who contribute to a forward-looking and productive agricultural sector. A more efficient allocation of funds reinforces the integrity of agricultural policy and promotes rural development.

Ensuring that farming remains a viable career choice for young people and families means supporting rural job opportunities, access to quality services, and investment in local economies. Also generational renewal is critical for the future of agriculture. Young farmers must have improved access to credit, grants, and risk-sharing mechanisms to establish and grow their operations.

3. A REAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: THE NEED FOR A REVISION OF THE GREEN DEAL

The ideological drift carried out in the previous term, also with the insane relationship between European bureaucrats, left-wing politicians and environmentalist NGOs, led to an artificial opposition between agriculture and the environment, even going so far as to provide premium rules for those farms that had renounced a part of their production.

All legislation contained in the “Fit for 55” package and in the “Farm to fork” and Biodiversity strategy must therefore be reviewed on the basis of new and independent clear impact assessments, that focus on not only environmental, but also economic and social, sustainability of European agriculture enterprises. The EU should encourage innovation in the sector, instead of imposing unrealistic emission reduction targets on it.

The regulatory burden must be decreased across the board, by reviewing the EU legislation that affects the agricultural sector and EU food production, including the Nitrates Directive and Habitats Directive. It is high time to carry out a reality check and review of the legislation as announced by the Commission.

It is our conviction, in fact, that only by involving farmers in the promotion of good practices and in the protection of territories, can true and balanced sustainability be achieved.

Naturally we're fully aware that, from droughts to floods, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events puts crops and food security at risk.

European agriculture must be equipped with water-saving technologies, such as precision irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and soil moisture monitoring systems. Promoting drought-resistant crops and improving water management policies will be key to sustaining agricultural productivity.

It must also be acknowledged that the EU cannot stay without fertilizers and realistic transitional strategies are needed. This problem is now aggravated by geopolitical tensions that have made the supply of fertilisers increasingly expensive.

Investigating natural alternatives to chemical fertilizers is therefore essential for environmental sustainability, a shared goal to maintain the health and economic resilience of agricultural systems and rural areas. In this context, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) has initiated a research project focused on establishing standardized criteria for the use of nitrogen fertilizers derived from manure.

The Commission should acknowledge the benefits of utilizing nitrogen fertilizers from organic sources, such as “digestate” produced through the anaerobic digestion of agricultural and livestock by-products, in full alignment with circular economy principles. This should result in more room in the Nitrates Directive for the use of raw animal manure and digestate.

On these solutions, we're ready to push more and more towards the Commission.

Already in the last term the co-legislators had rejected the Commission's proposal to significantly reduce the use of chemical fertilisers without proposing alternatives, thus seriously damaging the competitiveness of our agricultural companies in a global market in which many producing countries still use substances that we have banned for a long time.

The authorisation process for new plant protection products must be faster, more capacity needs to be made available for the authorisation. Until alternatives are registered, and widely available, existing substances must not be banned prematurely, as doing so would risk food security and economic stability.

Encouraging waste reduction and resource recycling within agricultural systems can lower costs and enhance sustainability. For example, crop residues can be used for bioenergy, and animal waste can be converted into organic fertilizers, creating closed-loop systems.

Under this perspective, in a view of a circular economy, farmers might be encouraged to produce bioenergy from agricultural waste, or even invest in small-scale renewable energy projects themselves. This diversification reduces dependence on crop yields alone and aligns with Europe's energy targets.

The development of biogas plants in rural areas should be supported, as they have the potential to reduce energy poverty in less developed areas.

We support the use of biofuels in the process of energy diversification and building a more sustainable energy mix reducing external dependencies.

4. ESTABLISHING A DEDICATED FINANCIAL RESERVE FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The agricultural sector is highly vulnerable to economic shocks, climate disasters, animal and plant diseases, and market fluctuations.

A dedicated financial reserve should be established outside of the CAP to provide rapid support during crises, ensuring resilience and stability for farmers. The financial framework should ensure equitable access to crisis reserve funding across all EU Member States, in view of the promotion of cohesion and uniformity within the Common Agricultural Policy.

Ensuring long-term stability will help mitigate risks, support farmers facing unexpected challenges, and secure the long-term viability of European agriculture.

This includes early warning systems, emergency response mechanisms and financial buffers.

Developing modern tools such as dynamic safety nets, automated response funds, and real-time data monitoring can help mitigate the impact of market crashes, natural disasters and supply chain disruptions.

EU-supported insurance schemes can help protect farmers from the financial fallout of crop failures, market volatility, and climate-related disasters. This safety net ensures income stability and encourages investment in innovative and sustainable practices.

A comprehensive agricultural insurance framework should improve affordability and simplification of the administrative procedures by **ensuring broader and more equitable access across the sector.**



5. CHALLENGING GLOBAL MARKETS: FAIR TRADE, RECIPROCITY, AND PROMOTION

In a time of growing geopolitical challenges, trade can play a positive role to strengthen European political influence towards third countries.

ECR is traditionally in favour of open markets favouring exports and economic growth. Nevertheless, trade must be not only free but also fair.

European farmers face increasing competition from non-EU producers who may not adhere to the same environmental and labour standards.

In increasingly global markets, there is a growing concern for the quality and traceability of agricultural products.

The European agricultural sector must be protected from imports that fail to meet EU food safety, environmental and labour standards.

New Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) must not undermine the sustainability of the European agriculture sector and the principle of reciprocity must be affirmed in every new negotiation.

Stricter border inspections, enhanced traceability systems and rapid-response mechanisms to detect and prevent food fraud should be established to strengthen import controls, ensuring that banned substances and non-compliant products do not enter the European market.

European consumers have the right to know where their food comes from. Implementing mandatory country of origin labelling for all agricultural products coming from outside the EU market will enhance transparency, build consumer trust, and enable informed purchasing decisions. Ensuring that European agricultural products are clearly labelled allows farmers to differentiate their high-quality and sustainably produced goods from lower-standard imports.

We fully support the swift implementation of the recent Regulation on Geographical Indications and the growing EU attention on protecting GIs in new trade deals.

In our view, in fact, protecting traditional farming practices and local food cultures is key to maintaining Europe's unique agricultural identity. Supporting regional products through certification schemes helps sustain local economies and strengthens European food sovereignty.

In the light of the potential international tensions, promoting European products in global markets, supporting branding initiatives, and securing trade agreements that do not harm European farmers can enhance competitiveness on an international scale. In the meantime, more effective controls must be imposed in order to face the spreading of "fake food", low-price products labelled with misleading brands that recall the original high quality products.

EU funding should be allocated to actively promote European food products globally. Campaigns should highlight the quality, sustainability, and cultural heritage of European agricultural products, reinforcing their competitive advantage.

Promotion schemes must support also animal proteins and wines, unjustly targeted by fake health campaigns.

6. STRENGTHENING FARMERS PROFITABILITY

The prices of agricultural products are subject to market fluctuations, which depend on factors such as international trade policies, geopolitical crises and climatic conditions.

This makes it difficult for farmers to plan and achieve stable incomes. Production costs are increasing, but profit margins are increasingly tight, also due to the pressure exerted by market factors.

An unbalanced value distribution along the food supply chain, with high concentration of distribution and production in the hands of a few players, still affects the primary producers, reducing their competitiveness.

In the last few years, the disruptive impact of inflation on the sector affected in a significant way its profitability and decreased the benefit coming from CAP funds not indexed to the cost of living.

A strong and resilient food system is therefore essential for ensuring national and European food security, reducing dependence on imports, mitigating supply chain disruptions and strengthening economic stability.

European farmers must be shielded from unfair trading practices that undermine their livelihoods. We support the proposals enforcing the Unfair Trade Practices (UTPs) Regulation recently submitted by the European Commission.

Policies should support local producers and protect them from exploitative practices by large corporations and international competitors.

This could be done, for example, by enforcing fair trade agreements with clear pricing, payment terms, and contract conditions; prohibiting unilateral contract changes and predatory pricing; supporting cooperatives for better price negotiations; creating a real-time pricing platform and imposing fines on companies engaging in unfair practices; offering financial aid, contract literacy training, and low-interest loans.

In this context, the new payment schemes - as defined in Chapter 2 - must recover the original CAP mission, that of ensuring a fair standard of living for farmers.



7. PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES WITHOUT DEMONIZING FOOD

Europe needs to address the growing demand for sustainable, healthy and traceable food. Our vision is to pay greater attention to food sovereignty, supporting agricultural practices that ensure food quality and safety.

Policies must promote access to healthy food for all, with a strong focus on the nutritional needs of each community.

However the healthiness of our food and the health of our consumers cannot be safeguarded through misleading front-back labelling mandatory schemes, as recently proposed by the Commission. In this regard, we welcomed the temporary stop to the so-called Nutri-Score system, while calling for its definitive withdrawal.

This system negatively conditions consumers choices, oversimplifying complex nutritional profiles and unfairly penalizing traditional European foods, including cheeses, olive oils and cured meats.

These products, integral to Europe's culinary heritage and Mediterranean diet - recognised by UNESCO as intangible heritage for its health and cultural values - offer nutritional benefits when consumed in moderation as part of balanced diets. A more holistic and fair approach to food labelling is needed to ensure that traditional foods are not marginalized.

Demonising labels are also tools foreseen by the Be.Ca. (Beating Cancer) strategy to bias red meats and wines. **We naturally support policies against cancer but we strongly opposed these manipulations. Furthermore, this kind of label, if applied by single Member States, would represent a clear breach of the internal market.**

Speaking about meats, in order to preserve Europe's agricultural traditions, ensure food integrity and the respect of precautionary principle, it is important to resist the proliferation of lab-grown cellular meats.

Supporting natural, farm-based animal protein production safeguards rural livelihoods, maintains food authenticity, and strengthens consumer trust in traditional farming systems.



8. TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION TO BOOST COMPETITIVENESS

There's no competitiveness of European agriculture without innovation.

In this regard, we fully supported from the very beginning the need for a EU Regulation authorising the development of New Genomic Techniques (NGTs). Therefore, we welcome the agreement recently reached at the Council level, that enhances the co-legislators to start the trilogue procedure.

Advances in NGTs, including gene-editing techniques, have the potential to improve crop resilience, reduce the need for chemical inputs, and enhance yields. NGTs offer huge potential to improve agriculture and medicine, with the aim of creating more resilient, healthy and productive plants.

These innovations must be supported through clear regulatory frameworks that encourage responsible adoption while maintaining high safety standards and ensuring availability of seed material for farmers at affordable prices. It must be ensured that plant material remains free of patents.

Innovation represents an opportunity also in terms of processes.

A culture of continuous improvement through research, development, and the adoption of new technologies ensures that European agriculture remains competitive and resilient in the face of evolving global demands and challenges.

Increased funding and coordinated EU-wide research initiatives can drive advancements in sustainable farming techniques, soil health, climate adaptation, and digital agriculture.

The adoption of AI, IoT, and drone technologies can optimize resource use, reduce input costs, and increase yields. Precision farming techniques enable farmers to apply water, fertilizers, and pesticides more efficiently, enhancing both productivity and environmental sustainability.

Implementing blockchain technology in supply chains ensures transparency and traceability. **This allows farmers to receive fair compensation, builds consumer trust, and simplifies compliance with food safety regulations.**

Providing training in modern farming techniques, digital tools, and business management equips farmers with the skills needed to thrive in a changing agricultural landscape. Additionally, grants and low-interest loans can support rural start-ups and innovation.

9. A REALISTIC APPROACH TO LARGE CARNIVORES

We've been supporting, and now we finally welcome, the recent shift in the European Commission's approach to the protection of large carnivores, which marks a significant evolution in wildlife management across Europe.

After several years of very high protection levels due to the full implementation of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, **the European Commission has recognized the need for an adaptive approach to large carnivores management, taking into account both conservation objectives and the needs of local communities.**

These strategies often include financial support for farmers and other stakeholders to implement measures that reduce conflict with large predators, such as the use of guard dogs or electric fencing.

This includes measures that ensure the well-being of both people and wildlife, such as compensation programs for livestock losses, non-lethal deterrents, and improved coexistence strategies. The long-awaited change of the protection status of wolves will indeed allow the relevant authorities room for management.

For many years, large carnivores such as wolves, bears, and lynx have been under strict protection due to their status as endangered species. The new direction taken by the Commission recognizes that the situation is evolving, as some populations of large carnivores have significantly increased in numbers and management is needed.



10. ANIMAL PROTEINS PRODUCTION AND WINE: TWO SECTORS TO BE SAFEGUARDED

The livestock sector contributes substantially to the European economy (€168 billion annually, more than 40% of the total agricultural activity) and creates direct jobs for 4 million people.

Maintaining and promoting the production of high-quality animal proteins is essential for European food security, cultural heritage, and rural economies. Livestock farming supports biodiversity, contributes to nutrient cycling, and sustains traditional landscapes. It is vital to continue investing in sustainable animal farming practices to meet consumers demand.

Despite common misconceptions, livestock is not a major contributor to CO₂ emissions. Indeed, livestock emissions primarily involve biogenic carbon, which is part of the natural carbon cycle. Well-managed grazing systems and sustainable farming practices can even contribute to carbon capture, helping to offset emissions and support environmental balance.

The European livestock sector must be supported to remain competitive globally. This includes promoting locally sourced feed, investment in innovative breeding techniques, improved animal welfare standards and efficiency-driven production models.

In recent decades, we have witnessed a considerable increase in animal diseases affecting our EU region.

There are no clear regulations that can show us the way on how to deal with epidemics from a socio-economic point of view, in the interest of our farmers and breeders. Strengthening veterinary services, **improving biosecurity measures, and enhancing disease surveillance systems will help protect livestock populations from outbreaks of infectious diseases, reducing economic losses and food supply risks.**

Other vulnerability reduction measures such as insurance and social protection schemes are also very important to protect and restore the most vulnerable groups, as well as payment for direct losses of animals and other forms of economic compensation for indirect costs.

In addition, preventive/curative tools in case of the spread of animal diseases in the EU must be made available for all EU livestock farmers.

Furthermore, such epidemics could also lead to significant changes in the availability and trade of products, with potentially important geopolitical and economic consequences and changes in consumers habits.



Protecting European Wine Production

European wine is not just an agricultural product but also a cultural symbol with deep historical roots. The crisis that is affecting the European wine sector is the result of multiple factors that are intertwined. **The first and perhaps the most impactful concerns climate conditions, which directly affects grape production and wine quality.**

Particularly difficult years, with extreme weather phenomena such as frosts, droughts and torrential rains, are changing the lifecycle of vines, causing damage to crops and reducing the quality of crops. In addition to agricultural difficulties, Europe is facing a demand crisis that involves both the domestic and international markets. **Demographic stagnation and changing consumption habits, which see wine relegated to a marginal role compared to other alcoholic beverages, have contributed to this decrease.**

Even the international market, which in the past represented the way of salvation for many European wineries, is experiencing a complex phase. **This situation of economic uncertainty and the lack of targeted incentive policies are holding back investments in the sector,** creating a vicious circle that risks further compromising the competitiveness of European wine on international markets.

It is essential to encourage innovation in agricultural practices and winemaking processes, focusing on more sustainable technologies that reduce environmental impact and improve product quality. Protecting vineyards from extreme weather impacts, promoting sustainable viticulture, and safeguarding Geographical Indications (GIs) are essential for maintaining the global reputation and economic viability of Europe's wine industry.

In addition, it is necessary to diversify the offer, responding to the new needs of consumers who are moving towards wines with a low alcohol content and organic.

The High Level Group on Wine can play a crucial role making proposals and exploring solutions to face this challenge.

In this Context, the 'wine package' presented by the Commissioner Hansen is good news for a sector of excellence that is currently experiencing difficulties and needs regulatory certainty and support.

The flexibility granted to Member States in authorising new vineyards is therefore a good news; the financial support of up to 80% for investments related to climate risk mitigation is excellent; the proposal to harmonise electronic labels is a step towards reducing administrative burdens and at the same time ensuring easy understanding for consumers, thus establishing an information model that goes beyond the creeping criminalisation of recent years.

The support for promotion is crucial, as well as the extension of measures to support wine tourism to protection consortia. Furthermore, we do stress the desire to bring clarity and transparency to "de-alcoholised wines", which on the one hand represent a growing segment on some non-EU markets and on some segments of the public **but on the other must not mislead consumers by penalising traditional wine.**



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