YOUNG FARMER MANIFESTO

CEJA
The European Council of Young Farmers
2015
This Manifesto aims to focus on the issues most relevant to young farmers reaching out to a wider section of society and areas of governance in order to raise awareness of the issues which need to be addressed for young farmers to help secure the future of EU agriculture. Young farmers value fairness, equivalence, the sharing of information and education. We as young farmers are the guardians of the European countryside and the environment.

This Manifesto comes at an important time for young farmers. 2015 marks the year of the first World Exhibition on the subjects of agriculture and food, with the EXPO Milano taking place on the theme of “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”. Young farmers are key to this vision of preserving a sustainable planet while feeding the world in future – but they must therefore be involved in the shaping of the framework for this vision, this future. Young farmers are also committed to contributing to the new agenda on climate change, an increasingly important and topical focus of Union policy and a reminder of the importance of viable long-term resource use. This Manifesto outlines young farmers’ priorities in this context of food security, inextricably linked to environmental sustainability.

Not only is it an important year for agriculture, but it is also an important year for Europe. As European Young Farmers, we are conscious of looking towards the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as well as to the latest reform and young farmers are eager to contribute to rebuilding a robust, competitive, but most importantly, sustainable EU economy. Young farmers employ more labour than others in the sector, and are committed to creating job opportunities and growth in rural areas for the future of the Union. However, for young farmers to be able to contribute to these objectives, they must be given the means to do so.

Only 7% of farmers in the EU are under the age of 35, compared to a third over the age of 65 and half over the age of 55. In order for this sector to flourish, EU regulation needs to be introduced, improved or simplified in a number of areas – particularly if we want to see young farmers carry this sector into the future.

1. The sector needs to be attractive and young people require support to set up farms in Europe, including facilitating access to land and credit for those young people who meet the relevant criteria. This should be done through the use of public support measures, including among others fostering public-private land transfer initiatives and support for succession brokering to facilitate access to land. Considering the scarcity of land within the European Union, it is imperative that an EU-wide strategy is established on this subject. Better access to credit is just as essential a requirement for young people attempting to establish themselves in the sector. CEJA advocates a stand-alone guarantee fund dedicated to young farmers with cooperation from the European Investment Fund (EIF). CEJA also advocates increased availability of long term loans with low interest rates for young farmers. Such measures would provide young

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1 “Younger farmers show higher levels than the EU average for the following characteristics: 40% more economic size units, 37% more hectares of UAA and 26% more labour use.” [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-area-economics/briefs/pdf/06_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-area-economics/briefs/pdf/06_en.pdf)
farmers with the financial backing they need instead of non-existent credit history or unobtainable assets as collateral in order to access credit for investments or other inputs in some of the most difficult years of their farming enterprise, when investments are high and returns are low.

2. There needs to be **deeper changes to the functioning of the food supply chain in Europe**, as it discriminates against producers and favours retailers instead to the detriment of both producers and consumers. Farmers lack in bargaining power, and therefore find themselves locked into unfair contracts in order to secure regular supply of their produce to big supermarkets, reducing their profit margins down and leaving them extremely tight or even non-existent. We need balanced food supply chains as for the moment, this is a huge factor leading to the loss of farms as well as a deterrent for young people who are considering following in the footsteps of farming families or young new entrants. Young farmers wish to forge **shorter supply chains and bring the consumer closer to the producer**. This leads to an increase in understanding of the food production system and **an increased valuation of the producer and produce, leading to less waste and more fairness**. Other areas of food waste young farmers would like to see tackled include an increase **in education and information for consumers from a very young age**. CEJA calls for more research in this area too, for example developing technology which could allow the expiry date label itself to test, evaluate and verify whether the product is still safe to eat. Finally, CEJA would also like to see the facilitation of food donations of food that would otherwise be wasted from retailers and other actors.

3. The fairness of the food supply chain also invokes questions relating to income volatility. A key factor in attracting young people to the sector, income volatility is linked to access to credit and the market. At EU-level, **measures to address income volatility** are lacking in the agricultural sector but looking at the market situation in the Union today, they are necessary for young farmers to be able to enter the sector and establish themselves successfully within it. Established farmers may be able to survive through times of serious income volatility, but young new entrants to the sector often fail to because they do not have the savings, collateral or credit to keep them afloat in harder times. CEJA therefore calls on measures **such as a minimum standard of income or a safety net** geared specifically towards safeguarding vulnerable young farmers in order to overcome this substantial barrier to the sector that young people are faced with.

4. The EU agricultural sector has a number of opportunities for growth and European food production is gaining more and more traction on the global market, however any trade agreement needs to be entered into with careful consideration for producers both in the EU and the rest of the world, in the same way as is mentioned above. There needs to be **support, protection and safeguards for sensitive sectors** if we are to guarantee that our farmers will be able to make the most of the trade opportunities available without their own economic viability, or EU production standards, being threatened. However, this would also lead to making rural areas more viable; a new generation of farmers will require an array of new services in rural areas for the benefit of all, including broadband, childcare and schooling, transport links, etc.
5. Young farmers are well-educated and informed on issues of agricultural sustainability, and are technologically-able and innovation-ready to turn theory into practice. Young farmers also have a longer-term stake in their farmland and need to be able to rely on its continued productivity for decades to come, and then for future generations, too. Young farmers are also particularly conscious of soil health and sustainability, and therefore it is crucial that they are helped on to agricultural land in order for them to protect some of the most fertile soils in the world, as well as the services these soils provide, from soil sealing due to construction or other soil uses. In this context, it is essential that agricultural land stays in the farming sector so that it is dedicated to production and protected from urbanisation and industrialization, particularly in the face of escalating land prices right across the Union.

6. Young farmers are therefore primed to be the custodians of our soils if they are given access to that land. Similarly, young farmers are primed to introduce the newest innovations and latest technologies in order to optimise land use. Research is indispensable to the agricultural sector, especially research which can be transferred from the laboratory to the field. Communication links between researchers and farmers are therefore essential in order for research to respond to genuine needs of farmers on the ground but also for results to be tested appropriately in the field.

7. This ties into the need not only for continuous fostering of innovation but also the need for education and information services for young people attempting to start a farm in the sector, as well as continued professional development throughout their career. This way, lifelong learning prevails and ensures that young farmers who are naturally innovative and technologically-able continue to stay up to date with new developments in the field thanks to continued professional development courses throughout their careers.

Young farmers are pioneers, innovators, who have their ears to the ground and are eager to flourish despite obstacles – it is these young farmers who should be taking the lead in shaping a better future for the EU agricultural sector. Young farmer numbers have been in decline for many years right across the Union, and we need to stem this tide in order to secure our future food supply but also to secure the other public goods that farmers provide to society. To maximise these opportunities and foster farms of the future, young farmers’ support schemes need to be urgently optimised. Young farmers must be involved in the debate and discussions which will shape the future of EU agriculture, especially at a time when it holds so many daunting challenges.

It is time to rethink the current agro-food system that we operate in the EU – we need:

- A circular economy to combat waste and tighten the weaknesses in the food chain
- More fairness and protection for producers in order for them to optimise their involvement in the system
- To empower farmers to deliver on sustainability, environmental protection and landscape conservation
Support for innovative solutions to future challenges including how to produce more from less, sustainably

Opportunities for young farmers to contribute to job creation and economic growth in rural areas, including trade opportunities.

With this in mind, **CEJA Calls for:**

1. A facilitation of access to land and credit through public support measures, in particular a European Bank Guarantee Fund for young farmers.
2. Regulation to curb unfair trading practices in the food supply chain including sanctions for retailers and confidentiality guarantees for producers.
3. Support for producer organisations enabling increase of cooperation, communication and therefore improve their bargaining power in the face of retail giants. There should also be income volatility measures to ensure young farmers do not slip through the safety net.
4. The legal protection of all EU standards in TTIP negotiations, safeguard clauses for sensitive sectors and increased promotion support for EU producers in the context of a trade agreement in order to preserve the EU family farming model.
5. Increased transparency in trade negotiations and increased farmer involvement, particularly young farmer representation.
6. Support for access to land in order to safeguard and protect soils, use water sustainably and optimise land use for food production.
7. Information and education to consumers on production processes in order to increase consumers’ understanding of where their food comes from and increased information and education about date labelling and the shopping and storing of food products, as well as better legislation for food donations of products that would otherwise have been wasted by retailers and other actors.
8. Continued professional development and education of young farmers to ensure they are equipped with the tools necessary to optimise their use of technology, innovation and best practices at farm level.

You can find the CEJA position papers, the main demands of which are outlined within this Manifesto, in Annex to the document.

1. Improving the Functioning of the Food Supply Chain
2. Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)
3. Young Farmers Protecting Soils by Optimising Land Use
4. Food Waste