

EP Hearing 'why are European farmers demonstrating'?

Speech LTO board member, Mr Thijs Rompelberg

Thank you Chair, thank you organisers for this opportunity to explain why farmers are demonstrating.

Today farmers and grower experience a lot of regulatory pressure. This is undermining the support for the European Union. However, we need a strong European Union. Unfortunately, many farmers and growers are losing confidence in the EU. So I would like to present the case for **a new agricultural and food strategy for Europe**.

This is needed because, today, the European Green Deal is not a done deal without the support of farmers and growers. **I support the Green Deal, but this should not just be about environmental sustainability, but also about economic and social sustainability.**

So I presenting you five important points.

We need to move from top-down to bottom-up

Farmers and growers want to run their farm. This should not be done by bureaucrat in an office in Brussels. They are open to transition, but they want to have the tools available to achieve that. What they don't need is top-down legislation that's not in line with the realities of farming and just telling them what to do.

For example: fixed dates to sow a catch crop don't work in practice. The weather determines the sowing and harvesting of crops.

Farmers and growers feel squeezed between agribusiness (upstream, downstream), banks and retailers on the one side, consumers and the market on the other side, and unpredictable government policies. That leads either to aggression or apathy. The last thing we need is sweeping statements about reduction of animal numbers. Also we don't need populism and empty promises. That will only lead to more discontent and frustration.

So we need outcome-based legislation. I am not against the green deal, but this can only be achieved by working with farmers and growers, not by imposing rules top-down. Farmers and growers want to be heard and understood. New ambitious goals for the future should come with tools that allow farmers and growers to make the necessary steps to enable the transition.

Secondly, European agriculture is diverse.

What works in one region, may not be appropriate in another. This is why I say: give farmers and growers clear targets and give them tools to reach those targets. But leave it to the farmers and growers how to do that. We should allow for

regional differentiation since across Europe, farmers and growers face different conditions as it comes to the weather, soils, pests and diseases and water availability etc. The potential for agriculture and horticulture may decline in parts of Europe. We need to focus on our open strategic autonomy.

Thirdly, on international trade.

We know the climate is changing and it impacts on farmers and growers. Many harvests are being ruined.... So it is clearly our interest too. But if we just start limiting production in Europe, products will be coming from elsewhere.... Our costs are higher than in most countries. So this needs to be part of international trade agreements and the WTO.

Citizens say: farming must become greener. But consumers don't pay. Food inflation makes consumers make different choices. Who will pay the costs of the green transition? Farmers and growers are pushed into two directions.... I say, we also need to trade, but trade on equal terms. We don't want to be undercut by substandard products from elsewhere. I as a farmer cannot go green if I'm in the red. I cannot be green and red at the same time. Let's integrate environmental demands into trade deals.

The need for innovation.

I am from what we call, a fertile delta, where conditions to produce are good. But we are also under pressure from a huge demand for land. So this is why we need technology and innovation to be able to stay competitive and produce in a sustainable way and reach the climate goals. **Fertile deltas** should be protected and technology could be part of the solution. This is for example why we need organic fertiliser to help agriculture to become circular and use less inorganic fertiliser. We call on the European Commission to register **RENURE** (recovered nitrogen from manure) as an inorganic fertiliser replacer.

Finally, the future CAP.

Agriculture is not like the oil industry. You cannot just pause half your cows or chickens for a few weeks. Increasing production is also difficult because of rules and regulations. We will face more shocks and more volatility. Are we as an industry robust enough to face the new challenges? This limits the interest of young people – they lack prospects to enter the industry. Regenerational renewal is under threat. This in returns has the potential to jeopardise European food security.

This is why the European Commission should regard farmers and agricultural land as a strategic asset that requires protection.

The CAP should help farmers and growers to make the transition. We need outcome-based measures, we don't need rules-based measures. We need Brussels law makers to work with farmers and growers to grow confidence and make the transition. That requires a budget that matches the growing ambitions and market

failures to pay the necessary premium for more sustainable production. We also need common sense – people who know agriculture. I am sure within European Commission and European Parliament many have the experience and intelligence to do the right things.

The European “Strategic Dialogue” should lead to a vision for the future agriculture and horticulture in Europe. We should agree what our industry should look like in 20 years from now, while respecting regional diversity and the differences between individual farmers and growers. It is about the movement – we should start on this trajectory together and we should do this bottom-up.

This way, we will agree on an agricultural and food strategy for Europe.

I look forward to a good cooperation with all of you.

Thank you and happy to answer any questions you may have.