Open letter: Civil Society alarmed by the prospect of regressive Common Agricultural Policy reform

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We are writing to you to address the way the current reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been managed by the European Parliament’s Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI).

The future of European agricultural and food policies is a societal issue that concerns us all. The majority of AGRI MEPs have ignored citizens’ calls and have failed to ensure that their concerns are fairly represented. This comes as a major disappointment to European citizens who had hoped that increased power to the European Parliament would close, rather than increase, the democratic gap the EU is facing.

The CAP is in crisis: the bulk of its considerable budget is distributed unfairly between farmers, with no clear policy objective in mind, while only small amounts support sustainable farming and rural areas. Instead, subsidies have driven, and continue to support, unhealthy and environmentally damaging approaches to farming and land management, poor animal welfare conditions and hindering the development of agriculture in developing countries. The public has repeatedly voiced these concerns but so far they have largely been ignored (a 2011 Eurobarometer shows that 77% of European citizens want more environmental conditionality attached to CAP subsidies).

Our organisations support the principle of public money for public goods in agriculture and rural development policy. This means public support must only be given to farmers in return for a healthy and vibrant countryside, and environmentally benign food production. Subsidies which negatively affect our environment, our health, jobs, developing countries and animal welfare should be abolished.

For the first time ever, MEPs have co-decision with Council to vote for change in agriculture policy. However, in January 2013, the Parliament’s AGRI Committee voted for a position that would de facto take the policy backwards.

Under the AGRI Committee’s vision for the CAP, money would continue to be unfairly distributed and support would be channelled to even the most polluting farming practices, with some farmers even paid twice for the same environmental practices (a principle going against the basic treaties of the EU). In essence, the AGRI Committee’s position goes against the environment, our health, jobs, animal welfare and developing countries. This also goes against the expressed opinions of the other committees in the European Parliament.

But you can change this! Up until now the debate has been controlled by a small group of MEPs defending vested interests in the larger AGRI Committee. In March, the full European Parliament will decide upon its final negotiating position and the opportunity to prevent a backwards and biased reform must be grasped with both hands.

The European Parliament has proven that it can change destructive policies for the better, most recently with the plenary vote on the Common Fisheries Policy’s Basic Regulation. Now is the time to do the same for the CAP.

We ask you, as public representatives, to act on behalf of real public interest when you vote on CAP reform in March, upholding the crucial role of the European Parliament.

Our organisations are at your disposal to help in reaching constructive solutions.