



HELSINKI DECLARATION

Introduction

On 13 February 2014, at a CEJA working group in Helsinki following the MTK Seminar entitled: “International Spring Parliament for European young farmers and youth in rural areas”, young farmers’ representatives from across Europe discussed the challenges facing young people attempting to enter the agricultural sector as well as the best ways to overcome them. These were then compiled and set out in this document and adopted by a majority of the Seminar’s participants. This Helsinki Declaration will be forwarded to the European Commission, European Council and the newly elected European Parliament

A Vote of Confidence

It is not a lack of willing young people which poses a threat to the future of European rural areas considering the high levels of youth unemployment and the increasing demand for high-quality, safe and diverse food, but the barriers to entry into the farming sector which pose a problem for young people attempting to start or takeover a farm. These consist of access to land; access to credit; low return on high investments in first years of business, which should be seen in a longer term; low profit share in the food chain; lack of predictability and price volatility.

These barriers can, and must, be overcome – whether a young person is starting a farm, taking over the business from their parents or setting up in collaboration.

- When taking over a family farm, it is essential that tools are there to ensure the full transition of ownership of the enterprise, both on and off paper, thereby giving the young farmer the space to make the necessary decisions of the development and everyday management of the rural enterprise.
- This transition should happen earlier rather than later considering the average head of a holding is over 55 in the EU and young people have proven themselves to be more productive, profitable and competitive than their parents.
- Most importantly, financial support needs to be available in order to enable the transition at all. Buying out parents and siblings requires access to capital and investments require access to credit, particularly in the context of a need for technological innovation or modernisation of the farm.

In order to achieve these objectives, a concrete set of tools must be available within the regulatory framework, as detailed below.



Tools

Setting up as head of a holding of a farm can be particularly challenging for young people, who are unlikely to have the capital to be able to obtain some of the substantial start-up investments necessary for taking over a farming business. This is particularly true in contrast to setting up other types of businesses, considering the unavoidably delayed returns on initial investments. Because of this, specific tools are required in public policy in order to overcome these specific challenges.

- ***All financial resources intended for young farmer support should be maximised and reserved exclusively for young farmer-related support measures***
- ***Financial support and prioritised access to capital and credit*** is crucial for young farmers in their first years of business, whether this is to:
 - help gain access to land to set up their farm, to buy out their parents, their siblings or other farmers who currently own the farm; or
 - help acquire machinery or other material investments for the farm, or to modernise current machinery or methods of production on the farm; or
 - diversify activities on the farm or provide added values to the methods of production or marketing and selling of the farm products
- ***Advisory services in a variety of areas*** should be easily accessible and free of charge for young farmers:
 - In particular, succession brokers and legal services should provide help and support with formalities involved in generational transitions
 - Legal implications of inheriting or taking over a farm differ according to Member State and can be complex
 - The emotional cost of having to initiate the conversation of “succession” between a family can be difficult and the subject can be a problematic to broach for farming families
 - This can be aided by professional “succession brokers” who facilitate the necessary discussion between family members on the subject, both emotionally and legally
 - Finally, advisory services in terms of business support, marketing advice and other financial advice are crucial to provide young people with the facts they need to get their farming business off the ground
- ***Education and training relevant to the sector*** should also be easily accessible and free of charge for young farmers:
 - This education and training, including further, post formal education must take into consideration the time and travel constraints of a farmer as well as his or her attachment to the land



- Subjects for such education and training should include courses in business management, marketing, environmental services, the use of technology and ICT tools, and more.
- **Price volatility and lack of predictability**
 - CEJA asks stakeholders and decision-makers to set up appropriate marketing tools in order to give more visibility to young farmers

Conclusion

Awareness of the challenges that young farmers face and of what the potential that bringing down the average age of European farmers could mean for the future of the sector and the economic growth it could provide should be increased.

Everyone has a stake in the future of food production; therefore the general public and all stakeholders, both political and apolitical, must give young farmers their support in order to raise their profile in politics and society, and to shape agricultural policy to encourage and facilitate the appropriate succession environment to enable young people to take over farms from an earlier age, both in terms of financial, business and legal support. It should be kept in mind that it is crucial that such farm takeovers constitute genuine transfers of the business, ensuring that young farmers take over farms in terms of full and legal long-term control and the related business decisions which need to be taken. This would enhance profitability and productivity of such enterprises and secure real generational renewal in the sector.