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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Results of the events organised by the Presidency on the future of agriculture, the CAP and the food system

Delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Presidency on the above-mentioned subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 26 March 2024.

Results of the events organised by the Presidency on the future of agriculture, the CAP and the food system

1. Symposium on the future of agriculture in the EU – Ghent, 1 February 2024

The Symposium on the Future of Agriculture in the EU was aimed at looking at the future development of the agricultural sector, as well as how and if research and innovation can ensure food security for the entire world population while minimizing the impact on our planet. Therefore, the Symposium sought to bring together leading experts, policymakers, sector representatives, agricultural organizations and researchers from across the European Union, as well as delegations from partner third countries. Through keynote speeches, panel discussions and interaction with participants, the Belgian Presidency aimed at exploring innovative strategies and solutions to address the challenges of the European agricultural system.

Our takeaways:

The common thread throughout the symposium consisted of three existential themes that will define the future food production potential in the EU: **market, sustainability and the relationship between food consumer and producer.**

In the market area, we looked at ways to improve the remuneration of farmers for the goods and services they provide. As recent protests by farmers have shown, farmers' labour income is under pressure and structurally below the average of other sectors. It also highlights the importance of generational change and farm succession within the European agricultural model. **As regards remuneration for the private goods produced by farmers**, the EU legislator has taken measures in recent years, such as combating unfair trade practices in the food chain and derogations on competition rules for producer organizations. However, the effectiveness of these policies and accompanying instruments needs to be evaluated. **Regarding remuneration for public services provided by farmers**, it is clear that private markets fail to compensate farmers for their services. Therefore, several keynote speakers stated the need for harmonized public policies at the EU level, which will inevitably have an impact on consumer food prices.

All human activities have some impact on the living environment; this is the same for food production. On **the environmental and climate front**, the toolbox on how the European livestock sector can manage and reduce its impact in the coming years was discussed. In addition to mitigation, adaptation, i.e. adapting to changed conditions such as drought, extreme precipitation, etc., also becomes important and is concretized as an example case from the dairy sector. On how the EU should aim **to reach the greening goals**, most speakers and participants agree on the fact that a goal-oriented approach is the way to follow, rather than a measure-based policy.

In our contemporary society, consumers are relieved by farmers in terms of their daily food needs. This led to human time and energy being freed up for other social developments and activities, such as the service economy but equally the healthcare and education sectors. The flip side of this is that contemporary consumers are increasingly alienated from the origins of their food. Communication with the consumers must be done on the basis of a team combining experts and non-experts, in order to find the right channels, the right words and the right manners to transmit messages to the general public and to different sectors. Furthermore, we look at how **the growing gap between farmers and citizens** can be closed and whether alternative food products (fermentation) can have a future within the context of the European and, by extension, global food issue. Farmers are at the heart of the food production chain. For this, we gave the floor to farmers from several member states to explain the main challenges they see for their own farms.

2. CAP Conference ‘Drafting CAP Strategic Plans: Challenges and Opportunities’ – Ghent, 23 February 2024

The Belgian Presidency organised a technical conference titled 'Drafting CAP Strategic Plans: Challenges and Opportunities'. Experts and policy makers from the European Commission and various European managing authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans reflected on the preparation process of the current CAP Strategic Plans. At the same time, efforts were made to draw lessons for the preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans post-2027.

Our takeaways:

In six different workshops, various needs were identified, solutions proposed, and recommendations made. Overall conclusions show that many Member States encountered similar challenges, such as the **lack of flexibility** in the CAP framework, the **high degree of complexity** and the **high level of detail** required.

The workshop **Unlocking Ecological Potential: Navigating CAP Regulations** focused on different barriers and success factors encountered in designing and implementing ecoschemes. Participants indicated that the most successful ecoschemes are developed in collaboration with the agricultural sector, supported by agricultural advisors, financially attractive, simple, and easy to understand. For high-level environmental measures, an incremental increase in complexity could be considered. Challenges include rigidity in control systems, in the CAP framework and in budgetary planning.

The workshop **Unlocking Economic Potential: Navigating CAP Regulations** showed there was a need for more opportunities for targeted support for incentives, more flexibility in the direct payment interventions and between pillars, and more budget for producer organisations. Coupled support should be maintained, and a more strategic approach in the plans should be sought.

In the workshop **Efficient Reporting: Striking a Balance** discussions focused on different topics related to the New Delivery Model, streamlining reporting processes and the Annual Performance Reports. Most recommendations included more transparency, trust-building, and timely clarity on the expectations of the European Commission.

The participants of the workshop **Subsidiarity and Level Playing Field: Defining the optimal CAP Framework** proposed more simplified notification procedures, a proportional assessment of amendments in the CAP Strategic Plans, and a harmonization across or restructuring of pillars and funds. There was also a request for more flexible amendments in unit amounts and indicators, and for timely clarity on the expectations of the Commission regarding control systems.

Participants of the workshop **Fostering Collaboration: Knowledge Exchange between Member States** agreed on the need for more physical and informal meetings among experts, a contact list of experts in the Member States, better access to information and data, and more regular meetings and contacts with other DGs.

During the workshop **Optimizing the Drafting of CAP SP: Streamlining Procedures** participants discussed the different steps of the preparation phase of the CAP Strategic Plan. Key challenges included the rigid target setting, the long and complex negotiation process, and an increased level of detail and ambitions. Proposed solutions included simpler legislation and CAP plans, a unified position within the Commission, clear agreements between Member States and geo desk on timeline and approach, and proportionality and trust. Also capacity building and consultation of stakeholders were mentioned as challenges. These could be tackled by informal exchanges and targeted consultations.

3. Open Food Conference – Leuven, 11-13 March 2024

The Belgian Presidency brought together over 700 international participants at the [Open Food Conference](#) in Leuven with the ambition to have an open dialogue on the future of sustainable food between policy makers, scientists, farmers, NGOs, food industry and stakeholders in the agrifood community. During these three days, together with more than 20 partners, goals and ambitions were set. Now, we need clear pathways to reach these objectives.

The messages of the 3 plenary sessions and 27 thematic sessions are clear and ask for urgent actions from local to European level:

- We need a systemic approach in building and implementing a strategy towards sustainable food systems (that incorporates short-, medium- and long-term goals).
- All policy levels, from the local to the EU level, have a role to play in building effective food policy across Europe, so innovative ways to create synergies should be found.
- More structured participation of civil society and food actors (e.g., through Food Policy Councils/European FPC) plays a key role in helping to achieve a just transition across the food supply chain.
- Innovation in food processing plays a pivotal role in achieving sustainable, safe, healthy and affordable food at the scale needed to feed our growing population.
- There is no dichotomy between food security and the sustainable transition. The two challenges go hand in hand.

- We need a new narrative for agriculture that re-values agriculture and depolarizes the debate: a positive story that brings hope and perspective. True policies should lead to fair prices for the farmer.
- The protein shift towards more plant-based and alternative proteins offers opportunities for prosperity, environment and health in Europe. There is a large support for a European protein strategy, currently being discussed.
- The healthy choice should be the easiest choice. Healthy food environments should be shaped and the potential of public procurement should be harnessed, as it is considered one of the most powerful tools to change dietary habits in a more sustainable and healthy way (e.g. more vegetables, fruits, pulses).
- Recognize that the school environment plays a crucial role in shaping the overall development and well-being of students, thus create an enabling framework for implementing healthy and sustainable food environment within and beyond schools.
- Food literacy can be improved by promoting easily accessible labels such as the Nutri-Score or positive measures that educate people about food production (gardening, cooking, farm visits).
- It's the responsibility of all food system stakeholders, from production to consumption, to take action to reduce food losses, from prevention to waste management. The European Commission's proposal to set legally binding food waste reduction targets by 2030 is promising.
- An open strategic autonomy approach applied to the food system means finding the right balance between cooperation and autonomy.
- The One Health approach is needed to optimize the health of humans, animals and the environment, yet its implementation remains a challenge.

- Transitioning a food system is a collective effort from all stakeholders: governments, farmers, businesses, civil society and consumers. The only way to achieve our challenges is together. We need a constructive science policy dialogue to push policy making and innovation in the right direction.

True and fair food pricing principles are key for this change and to innovate. ‘Cheap food is expensive’, was highlighted. We need fair prices that cover all costs, also the societal costs (health, ecological, climate). At the same time an effective food policy ensures the right to food for all. This right goes beyond the boundaries of the European Union, just like the challenge of tackling climate change.

We are certain that this conference can accelerate the necessary collaboration in and with Europe. There’s a need for a coherent food policy dealing with systemic issues. It needs political decisiveness, strengthened by coherent instruments and positive and science-based communication to make change happen. Strengthening the interface between science, policy and civil society is crucial.

