



**ECVC member organisations by country:** ÖBV, MAP, Boerenforum, FUGEA, LIFE, Frie Bøender, MIJARC-Europe, ESVY, Confédération Paysanne, Modef, Elkana, AbL, Talamh Beo, AIAB, ARI, Toekomsboeren, NBS, CNA, Eco ruralis, COAG, SOC-SAT, EHNE Bizkaia, Sindicato Labrego Galego, NOrdbruk, Uniterre, L'Autre Syndicat, Cifti-sen, Land Workers' Alliance.



Coordinadora Ecoloxista d'Asturies



Dört Mevsim Ekolojik Yaşam Derneği



FIAN INTERNATIONAL SVERIGE



FIAN AUSTRIA



# OPEN LETTER FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEASANT STRUGGLES – 17 APRIL 2021

## EUROPE NEEDS MORE FARMERS

### For the attention of:

Executive Vice President of the European Commission, Mr Frans Timmermans  
Commissioner Ms Stella Kyriakides  
Commissioner Mr Janusz Wojciechowski  
Commissioner Mr Virginijus Sinkevičius  
President of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, Portugal Agriculture Minister, Ms Maria do Céu Antunes  
Agriculture Portuguese Permanent Representative to the European Union, Mr César Cortes  
Member of the European Parliament, Mr Eric Andrieu  
Member of the European Parliament, Mr Peter Jahr  
Member of the European Parliament, Ms Ulrike Müller

16 April 2021, Brussels

17 April marks the International Day of Peasant Struggles. On this day, we commemorate the massacre of 21 landless peasants in 1996 in Eldorado dos Carajás, Brazil, while demonstrating in support of comprehensive agrarian reform.

This day is important for Europe, where peasant agriculture accounts for the majority of farms and offers fair and sustainable economic models. In the EU, despite the decreasing number of farms and increasing concentration of land in the hands of a few, agriculture remains predominantly small-scale. According to reports published in 2015 and 2016 11,885,000 (97%) farms are smaller than 100 ha<sup>1</sup> and 69% are less than 5 ha.<sup>2</sup> These small farms, and the people who work on them, are key to the very foundations of all agriculture: the peasant seeds systems from which all seeds were born, the work and conservation of the land so that it is fertile and diverse and the transmission of knowledge that has been successfully feeding the population for thousands of years. A sustainable food system - one that can guarantee healthy food for the whole population, invigorate rural areas, and conserve territorial, biological and cultural diversity - thus needs more farmers.

Today, **in a letter signed by farmers' organisations, allies and academics**, we underline the key role of small and medium-sized farmers in the resolution of current social, environmental, and food-related crises at different scales and levels. We are at a crossroads: the COVID-19 pandemic is underway and its end cannot be predicted, the CAP reform is in triologue and national strategic plans

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<sup>1</sup> Van der Ploeg, J.D. 2016. Family farming in Europe and Central Asia: history, characteristics, threats and potentials. FAO working paper 153. Available from: [www.ipc-undp.org](http://www.ipc-undp.org)

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat data as referenced in: ECVC, Confédération paysanne and Envie de paysans! 2015. How can public policy support small-scale family farms?

are under elaboration, the European Union is implementing the European Green Deal with the Climate Law proposal, and the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies. It is time to turn objectives into coherent actions.

**The COVID-19 pandemic reminds us of the stark need to rebuild resilience and to move towards food sovereignty.** The European Union must become resilient to these shocks by regaining the political capacity to decide and regulate agricultural and food markets. Firstly, there must be a thorough review of Europe's international trade policy, which today prevents the creation of meaningful public policies to improve food systems in terms of quality, food security, environmental sustainability, social inclusion and rural development. We also demand a Common European Food Policy, supported by a Common Food Council that would exchange with local food councils. As part of its [contingency plan](#), a food resilience strategy must be implemented at the level of European territories, developed jointly with farmers' organisations and local communities. This also implies a more equitable distribution of agricultural resources, a policy of sustainable relocation of production and marketing, and the creation of strategic food reserves. More than ever, it is necessary to prioritise and strengthen financial autonomy; rights and access to production-related resources such as seeds; and autonomy in tools and techniques for farmers. Furthermore, it is necessary to support agroecological peasant farms, which have already demonstrated their resilience during the crisis, as well as the quantity, consistency and quality of production they offer. The number of small-scale farmers must increase, and there must be a clear ban on mega-farms in Europe.

**As we speak, the three main EU institutions are finalising the post-2020 CAP reform. No excuse can be found for not integrating social conditionality for the first time, and implementing a fairer distribution of subsidies.** Market regulation measures are essential in order to achieve prices that cover the costs of healthy and sustainable production and CAP subsidies should not be distributed based on hectares, but rather on the actual work of farmers. Capping and redistributive payment tools for subsidies must be binding and ensure this fairer distribution. They must also require labour and social rights to be respected, something that is also crucial in the framework of the implementation of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas](#) (UNDROP) at EU level. This implementation would recognise the rights to access employment, social security, housing, health and fair wages for all rural workers, including migrants. We need more farmers and farm workers, working in dignified conditions.

**Agroecology and more farmers on the land are answers to the huge challenge of climate change.** Above all, we ask you to work to put in place measures to really reduce greenhouse gas emissions rather than implementing any mechanisms to offset them. At the farm level, [several studies](#) show that the absorption of greenhouse gases by the soil is much more efficient when it is worked according to the principles of agroecology. It maximises biodiversity and stimulates interactions between different plant and animal species as part of holistic strategies to build long-term fertility, reduce pest and disease risk, protect freshwater systems, and secure pollination services. Not only does it safeguard healthy agroecosystems but also implies the presence of a lot of workers securing their livelihoods and rights. Once more, small-scale farms must be supported. Consequently, at a broader level, imports and exports of agricultural products must also be drastically reduced, and regional production promoted. It is a priority that all agricultural products entering the EU meet the same social and environmental standards as those applied to European production.

**In view of the omnipresence of digitalisation and new technologies in agriculture within current political debates, it must be clear: technology must not lead to rural areas becoming deserted.** When they are elaborated and led by farmers, used carefully, respectfully and with democratic decision-making mechanisms, technologies are useful. However, precision technology should not be seen as



an automatic and efficient solution to all economic, social and environmental problems. For the most part, they intentionally or consequentially reinforce the most industrial and polluting agricultural models. Incentives to expensive and privately owned digital technologies force farmers to take on unmanageable debt, to be reliant on industry and ultimately reduces farm-related rural employment without considering the social and environmental impacts. Farmers must also have the means to guarantee the security and control of their data and a strong principle of precaution and information must be applied in any promotion of new innovations. Social and environmental impacts must be studied in the long term and results must be freely disseminated. We demand the creation of an observatory to monitor these impacts.

**The ongoing debates on the regulation of new and old Genetically Modified Organisms are also alarming.** In recent years, the biotech industry has been running a huge communication campaign to remove the regulation and labelling of new GMOs, that some mistakenly call “new plant breeding techniques” in order to confuse citizens. Yet, contrary to what is being communicated, these technologies are not suitable for sustainable agriculture. For farmers' organisations, these agronomic solutions not only facilitate the concentration of power through patents in the seed sector, in clear contradiction with farmers' rights to seeds, but also do not focus on adaptation-based agricultural research, instead rather on an unnatural genetic orientation that wants to optimise an agricultural model based on monoculture and that pushes plant pathogens to mutate rapidly and become even more dangerous, thus increasing the use of pesticides instead of decreasing it. We ask that Directive 2001/18/EC be firmly maintained and that farmers' right to seeds be recognised in the future reform of the law on seed marketing.

**Access to land must also be made easier to enable many new farmers to enter into the profession. Many farms will have to be passed on in the years to come, due to the ageing of the agricultural population in Europe: depending on the measures that are or are not taken regarding agricultural land, this may lead to greater concentration and rural desertification, or to the agro-ecological transition that we so desperately need .** Land must no longer be treated as a commodity, but a common and multifunctional good. We ask you to follow up on the European Parliament INI report 2016/2141, and establish a land directive to provide greater guidance on how to regulate agricultural land markets in conformity with EU law. We ask that this directive be accompanied by the creation of a land observatory to monitor land transactions, including the impact of share deals, and to block land concentration processes. Despite various reforms, the CAP continues to act as an incentive for farms to accumulate as much land as possible turning the EU's largest funding line into a direct support to big business, against the EU's principle of territorial cohesion. We demand that EU policies place European farmers at its centre. The EU must set the tone on a European level to encourage the development of a national land policy and facilitate positive change driven by farmers themselves at a municipal level.

**Finally, on this 17 April, we highlight that if the implementation of the European Green Deal is truly going to “leave no one behind”, the EU must respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas by consistently implementing the UNDRIP.** This declaration was adopted by a large majority of UN member states, with 121 votes in favour, and is now part of the international consensus on human rights. To date, no commitment has been made to implement these rights in EU policy, but the EU, in good faith, has an obligation to do so. The time has come to take legislative, administrative and other measures to progressively achieve the full realisation of the rights outlined in UNDRIP, particularly within the context of the current CAP negotiations and the creation of Green Deal legislation.

We are all concerned by agriculture. The individuals and families behind farming often carry the legacy of unique experiences, accumulated over several generations, that have made it possible to preserve biodiversity and cope with climate change, while being able to feed the continent with fresh, healthy, local, nutritious and safe food. None of this can be replaced by production models that value profit and productivity over health and sustainability. The EU must stop favouring the large-scale industrial agricultural production model that disadvantages small and medium farmers and leaves rural areas deserted.

By fulfilling your commitments under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sustainable Development Goals, and UNDROP, by implementing the CAP, the Green Deal and, in particular, the Biodiversity Strategy, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the European Climate Law, you have the opportunity to make the European Union an example for the rest of the world to follow: not only in terms of agriculture, but also in terms living together in a healthy, resilient and just environment.

Thank you for your attention. We are counting on you and rest at your disposition to support in this transition.

**Signed by:**

**European, national, regional and global organisations**

1. European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) and members
2. Asociación A Pie de Barrio
3. Agroecology Europe
4. Agroecology now!
5. Aktion Agrar e.V
6. AGTER
7. ARC2020
8. Amigos de la Tierra España
9. Association for Farmers Rights Defense, AFRD
10. Asrori Farm
11. Attac Austria
12. Association SOL alternatives agroécologiques et solidaires
13. Biodynamic Federation Demeter International
14. Bio Farmers for Sustainable Agriculture, BFSA
15. Bogatepe Environment and Life association
16. Biogarden - in harmony with nature
17. CIDSE
18. CCFD-Terre Solidaire
19. Coordinadora Ecoloxista d'Asturies
20. Conseyu de la Moceda de Xixón
21. Croatian organic farmers associations alliance (HSEP)
22. Corporate Europe (CEO)
23. Ecoloxistes n'Aicion d'Asturies
24. Ecoloxistas en acción Galiza
25. El Garrapiellu
26. European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture, and Tourism sectors and allied branches (EFFAT)
27. Escola de Pastors de Catalunya - Associació Rurbans
28. Ernährungsrat Wien (Food Policy Council Vienna)
29. FIAN Belgium
30. EuroNatur
31. FIAN Sweden
32. FIAN Germany
33. Food & Water Action Europe
34. FIAN Austria
35. Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)
36. Four Seasons Ecological Living Association
37. Gartenpolylog
38. FSU

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| 39. GEOTA  | 40. Générations Futures  |
| 41. InTeRCeR - Institute for Sustainable Development and Holistic Solutions  | 42. Global 2000  |
| 43. la Asociación Acción Clima de Navarra                                    | 44. La Asamblea de Soberanía Alimentaria de Navarra                  |
| 45. Mensa Cívica   | 46. Association FILIÈRE PAYSANNE                                     |
| 47. OGM dangers  | 48. Mundubat   |
| 49. Permaculture Association of Slovenia (Društvo za permakulturo Slovenije) | 50. PAUSA network  |
| 51. Plataforma por la salud y la sanidad pública de Asturias                 | 52. Plataforma Antitérmica La Pereda                                 |
| 53. Quercus - Associação Nacional de Conservação da Natureza                 | 54. Plataforma Transgénicos Fora                                     |
| 55. Sezonieri - Campaign for the Rights of Harvest Workers                   | 56. Réseau Environnement Santé (RES)                                 |
| 57. SOS Faim Luxembourg  | 58. Slow Food Europe   |
| 59. Caerhys Organic Community Agriculture (CSA)                              | 60. Südwind Verein für Entwicklungspolitik und globale Gerechtigkeit |
| 61. Unione Sindacale di Base (USB)   | 62. Transnational Institute (TNI)                                    |
| 63. Wecf France  | 64. Urgenci  |
| 65. ZERO - Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável                          | 66. Welthaus Graz  |

### Academics

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Mauro Conti                  | Post-doctoral Researcher, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Centre for Rural Development Studies, Università della Calabria |
| 2. Christophe Golay             | Senior Research Fellow at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights  |
| 3. Marta Guadalupe Rivera Ferre | Agroecology and Food Systems Chair, Director, University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia  |
| 4. Annamaria Vitale             | Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Calabria  |
| 5. Marta Soler Montiel          | Profesora de Economía, Departamento Economía Aplicada II, Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería Agronómica, Universidad de Sevilla    |
| 6. Isabella Giunta              | CeSSR/Unical, IAEN   |
| 7. Alexander Wezel              | Directeur de la Recherche, Isara   |
| 8. Marian Simon Rojo            | Associate professor, universidad Politécnica de Madrid   |
| 9. Jeroen de Vries              | Director Researcher LE:NOTRE Institute   |
| 10. Irene Sotiropoulou          | Researcher, Energy and Environment Institute, University of Hull   |

11. Elisa Oteros-Rozas Postdoctoral Researcher at the Chair on Agroecology and Food Systems, University of Vic
12. Markus Schermer Prof. Dr. Institut für Soziologie/Department of Sociology, Universität Innsbruck
13. Dr. Barbara Smetschka Deputy Head, Institute of Social Ecology (SEC) Department of Economics and Social Sciences (WiSo) University of Natural Resources & Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)
14. Dr. Christina Plank Institute for Sustainable Economic Development, Department of Economics and Social Sciences (WiSo), University of Natural Resources & Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)
15. Carolin Holtkamp University of Innsbruck, Department of Sociology
16. RCE Graz-Styria University of Graz
17. DI Stephan Pabst Projektmitarbeiter, PhD-Student, Department of Sociology, Universität Innsbruck
18. Danko Simić University Assistant, Department of Geography and Regional Science, University of Graz
19. Tania Pacheff Diététicienne-nutritionniste et consultante en santé environnementale
20. José Brochier Agronomist

You can read the full list of signatories here: [www.eurovia.org/open-letter-europe-needs-more-farmers](http://www.eurovia.org/open-letter-europe-needs-more-farmers)