

ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

FURTHER WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSIONER- DESIGNATE FOR AGRICULTURE

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Thank you for giving me this opportunity to provide more information on the portfolio of Agriculture and Rural Development, along with my thoughts on how to make European agriculture more competitive, greener, fair and innovative.

I/ At the Hearing of 1 October 2019, you talked about a long-term vision for agriculture. What is it, and how would you integrate it into the existing CAP reform, in particular, with reference to:

1.1- The European Green Deal: What role do you foresee for organic farming and new breeding techniques?

The European Green Deal and in particular the Farm to Fork Strategy will provide the framework for a long term vision for rural areas, of which agriculture will play an important part. This will address key issues related to farming methods and to how we can produce food safely and sustainably. They will explore policy responses to these drivers and challenges. This long-term vision will build on the extensive analysis, reflected in the impact assessment that accompanies the CAP reform proposals.

Organic farming can indeed play an important role in the context of the European Green Deal in order to address climate change and to reach the objective of zero pollution. It can very much contribute to the improvement of the biodiversity and the protection of the soils thanks to the reduction of the use of pesticides and fertilisers. The total organic area in the EU-28 was 12.6 million hectares (ha) in 2017. The increase in organic area between 2012 and 2017 was 25 %, according to Eurostat. This clearly shows that consumers are more and more inclined to buy organic food. I strongly believe that the European Union should encourage organic production in the framework of the Common Agriculture Policy reform. Member States should seize this opportunity to increase the support to organic farmers in their national Strategic Plans. New eco-schemes could be used to promote it and to duly remunerate those farmers. I will submit to you a European Action Plan to promote organic farming and I am looking forward to your contribution.

As you know, new breeding techniques will fall under the responsibility of my colleague Stella Kyriakides. I believe that we need to engage in a discussion with all stakeholders and citizens on this issue, in the light of the Case Law of the European Court of Justice. Any possible measures on safe use of new breeding techniques must be adequate and proportionate and we need to see how they could be used. A lot of research is already ongoing in the EU on new breeding techniques and we will need to look at all available evidence. I will work closely with the Commissioner for Health and with the European Parliament on this.

1.2- Family farming: Which concrete measures will you take to prevent land grabbing and what is your position on the compromise reached in COMAGRI concerning capping and the redistributive payment?

As part of its proposal for the future policy, the Commission has proposed to maintain the key instrument for making agriculture a sustainable source of income for our farming community, namely the direct payments.

The lion share of this income support is granted to family farms; in fact, today, 72% of total direct payments go to medium-size professional family farms – with between 5 and 250 ha – who farm 2/3 of the EU agricultural area.

However, a significant and rising share of income support is being captured by very large agricultural holdings (above 250 ha) which farm around 30% of EU agricultural land, while only representing slightly more than 1% of the total number of farms.

This situation has raised concerns and could put at risk the legitimacy and credibility of the CAP among EU citizens. It also affects the efficiency of our main support policy instrument as large farms benefit from economies of scale and higher flexibility in the management.

As a result, the Commission has proposed to introduce a series of important tools and mechanisms that aim at improving the distribution and targeting of support across CAP beneficiaries.

They relate primarily to the mandatory introduction of:

- A complementary redistributive payment for sustainability for small and medium-size farms (to be defined by member States): this redistributive payment, which is already implemented in 10 Member States, has proved efficient in redistributing support from larger to smaller farms in the EU context where on average income increases with farm size;
- A mechanism of reduction of payments and capping: with a progressive reduction of direct payments starting at the level of 60 000 EUR and a capping at 100 000 EUR. These figures have been proposed to make a real change in income support distribution as around 30 000 farms currently benefit from amounts higher than EUR 100 000, i.e. less than 0.5% of the supported population but who absorb more than 15% of direct support. I am of the view that an upward revision in these thresholds would significantly reduce the effectiveness of the mechanism and call into question its relevance.

I should add that Member States will also be obliged to target support to those who truly need it, i.e. genuine farmers or in other words to those who mainly depend on farming to earn their living. It is crucial that this remains an obligation for all Member States for improving the public perception of the CAP and its performance. This should also prevent that entities whose principal business is not agriculture be granted income support they do not need while diverting it from the others.

Member States can also use the so-called round-sum payment for simplifying the life of small farmers and ensure they get an amount that helps them become more competitive despite their size.

Finally, let me recall that Member States will have, as part of their Strategic Plan, to set a target in terms of redistribution to smaller farms (farms below average farm size). The achievement of this target will be closely monitored as part of the annual performance review exercise the Commission has proposed for the future CAP. Member States will thus design their intervention strategy using the tools I just described to make sure they achieve their target.

I am aware of the COMAGRI proposal for capping consisting of compulsory reduction as from EUR 100,000, no capping and no rate of reduction. I am also aware of how controversial this was in the discussions. I believe that compulsory capping benefits clearly the family farmers and that issue, as you are aware, is one of my main priorities.

A well-functioning market for land is key to preserve the European model of farming but the regulation of land transfer is not a competence conferred on the Union and thus remains with the Member States, according to the Treaty. Farmland is recognised as a scarce and special asset. Nearly all Member States therefore have legislation in force to ensure proper management of land, to avoid excessive speculation with farmland and to tackle concentration of ownership of farmland. I continue to consider issues on land concentration important and I can assure you that the Commission will continue to closely monitor the functioning of the land markets.

1.3- Innovation: Could you please inform us of concrete areas in which you see potential for innovation in the agricultural sector?

One general issue related to innovation is that the knowledge already available is not sufficiently used or useable by the farming community. The farmers need to take ownership of new technologies, new business models and new forms of cooperation. The CAP can make a substantial contribution by putting farmers at the centre of the innovation process. One effective instrument is the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI). The EIP-AGRI has already financed more than 1 200 operational groups throughout the EU. In more than 90% of these groups farmers are present and play a key role in developing innovations that can be immediately operational in fields ranging from water and soil management, control of pests and diseases, food quality, competitiveness of the value chains, energy efficiency and many others. Fostering innovation through instruments like the EIP is key for European farmers and foresters to tackle future challenges and to help them improve productivity, resilience and sustainability.

Another important area which will have an enormous potential for innovation is the area of digitalisation of agriculture (internet of things, precision farming). It has the potential to foster the sustainability of the sector and of the whole value chain, from production to consumption. The innovation in the circular economy will contribute to improve natural resource use (re-use of waste, etc.) and to foster rural growth with new activities and businesses. In particular, the development of new uses of the biomass, through the bioeconomy, offers opportunities for farmers to integrate new value chains (such as renewable energy; new materials from biological sources) and increase their income. Such innovations as agro-forestry can bring multiple benefits to farmers (better control of diseases or additional income with timber for instance) and at the same time foster climate mitigation (carbon storage) and adaptation (improved micro-climate). Innovations in biocontrol of pests and diseases assisted with digitalisation should also allow reducing the use of chemical pesticides in the farming sector.

Knowledge dissemination is based on knowledge generation. Under the next MFF, the Commission proposed a budget of € 10 billion for research into agriculture, food and natural resources, including a specific focus on soils.

The results of research and innovation are encouraging but I request your help to disseminate them in the EU. Every time I would visit a Member State, I want to include in my programme an event related to research and agricultural innovation.

2.1/ One of the founding principles of CAP was to “to ensure a fair standard of living for farmers”. How will you ensure equitable distributions of CAP payments in the next CAP reform to fulfil this principle? In particular, will you commit to support full convergence of payments per/HA within Member States in the next programming period, bearing in mind that divergent payments within Member States are based historic data going back pre 2003 when payment were decoupled and are therefore indefensible?

I am favourable to reaching in due time full internal convergence.

I am aware that differences in the level of basic payment per hectare between farmers in the same Member States subsist. Some of these differences are fully justified and will be justifiable also when implementing the Commission proposal because not all farmers within a Member State face the same agronomic and socio-economic situations. In this context, the Commission proposed that all Member States will have the option to differentiate the level of basic support between groups of territories faced with different agronomic or socio-economic conditions.

In the current system, out of the 18 Member States that grant the basic payment using payment entitlements, 7 will still have entitlements partly based on historical production references at the end of this year (as a result of the 2013 reform). The Commission proposes to impose further convergence of the value of entitlements with a minimum target of 75% of the average value for all entitlements in the same Member State, or group of territories, by 2026 at the latest. This is a minimum; all Member States may opt for full internal convergence at Member State or group of territories level. This obligation is combined with the requirement to set a maximum value to all entitlements to get rid of unjustifiably high values that, although in a marginal way, still exist in some Member States.

These minimum obligations should be seen in the broader context of the proposal of the Commission that each Member State should plan their intervention strategy (for all instruments, including direct support) based on their SWOT analysis per each of the 9 specific objectives and resulting needs. This applies equally to all specific objectives including that of supporting viable farm income and resilience across the Union to enhance food security. Unlike in the current system, Member States must justify the amounts of support they will plan to grant also in the form of basic income support. Deciding to maintain certain individual differences based on historical references should result from this process of assessment and be justified. It will be subject to approval by the Commission.

2.2 In order that we can defend and maintain the CAP budget in the future what initiatives do you intend to take in your mandate to ensure that farmers in receipt of CAP payment engage

in meaningful actions to deal with the issue of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and to address animal welfare concerns related to intensive livestock farming?

Animal welfare is very important to me. I want to do more on this topic, but with the farmers and not against them. This is an issue I will work closely on with the Commissioner for Health.

The current policy as well as the proposal for future CAP condition support payments – among other elements – to respecting the EU general food law through the cross-compliance (future conditionality) mechanism. This inter alia requires the enforcement of the legislation on veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed.

The proposal for the future CAP also includes the implementation of the ‘Strategy for a European One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance’ (COM(2017) 339) in the Farm Advisory Services (FAS). Through the FAS the Member States will need to ensure advice to farmers in order to help them understand the objectives and fulfil the requirements of the EU legislation.

I am concerned by critical areas of implementation of current animal welfare rules in the EU (one of them is the widespread use of the derogation to mutilation in pigs, and tail docking in particular, which needs to be addressed). We need to ensure transposition of EU Directives into national legislation. Equally importantly, farmers need encouragement. With the CAP, we can provide support for training, advice and investments and consequently improve the way animals are kept.

There is a link between the level of animal welfare and the need for systematic use of antibiotics in farm animals. Appropriate management to improve both requires additional efforts by the farmers, which needs to be supported. I will pay particular attention to this point during my mandate.

The entry into force of the new rules on the use of veterinary medicines at the beginning of 2022, which will importantly reduce the possibilities to use antibiotics, will require substantial changes in managing farmed animals. Therefore, we need to consider how to develop schemes for livestock farming, which help farmers to adapt to the future. In particular, farmers need to be ready to phase out prophylactic uses for group treatments of animals and reserve critically important antibiotics for human health. New management practices in livestock farming will have to be holistic. In this respect, efforts to improve animal welfare will also be important for disease prevention.

The outcome of the ongoing evaluation of the 2012-2015 animal welfare strategy will give us information to determine future actions. It is important to have a consistent approach to animal welfare and maintain a science based position in the international dimension to ensure the level playing field for the EU farmers in a multilateral context. I intend to work very closely with my fellow Commissioners-designate for Health and Trade to achieve this.

3.1/ In the hearing on 1 October, you acknowledged that the CAP Reform proposal probably goes too far towards re-nationalisation. You also referred to the Court of Auditors’ criticisms of the proposal, and said a number of times that you are open to improving the proposal. However, in your written answers, you said "As an experienced auditor, I believe in a change towards a policy based on performance rather than compliance and I think that public expenditure must be focused on achieving measurable results. I stand ready to work with the

European Parliament and Member States to ensure this change in management of the CAP will work for both farmers and administrations." What exactly is your position? How, in concrete terms, do you intend to improve the proposal, and in what timeframe?

I am convinced that the Commission's proposals for the CAP post-2020 provide a good basis for discussions on the future of Europe's agricultural policy. I am strengthened in this belief by the general support the proposals received in COMAGRI in April of this year and in Council. At the same time, both COMAGRI and Member States tabled amendments and I stand ready to consider adapting the proposal where there is consensus between the co-legislators.

EU agriculture and rural areas have faced challenges in the past and – framed by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – were able to adapt and cope with ever-new circumstances. The Commission proposals for the CAP post-2020 continue on this path. They lay out a series of improvements for a simpler and more modern 'CAP toolbox' which will enable farmers and rural communities across Europe to reply to common challenges, whose local impact very much depends on the wider socio-economic and agronomic settings in a given Member State.

1) Two pillars, one strategy. The CAP is now governed by two different mechanisms, for direct payment schemes and rural development measures, not allowing for a synergetic use of funding across the CAP. In future, these two mechanisms will be brought together into a single national CAP plan.

2) Better targeted interventions. The proposed enhanced margin of manoeuvre will enable Member States to choose and come up with interventions which reply in a targeted and simpler way to their circumstances. This enhanced link to territories is in line with the principle of subsidiarity. If used to the full, this can contribute to a better understanding and comprehension of EU policies by farmers and citizens on the grounds.

3) Focus on performance. Delivering results for our farmers, rural areas and citizens must be a shared concern and has induced the Commission to put the performance at the heart of the next CAP. This means concretely to strategically define, plan and monitor progress towards our common objectives with creative and targeted solutions, rather than first defining very prescriptive, one-size fits it all approaches and then investing time and resources to define and control exceptions with high costs and burden for our administrations and farmers.

While opening up new opportunities for administrations at all levels to better engage with CAP beneficiaries, the proposal is not a "carte-blanche" for Member States - there are carefully designed safeguards within a strong framework of common rules at EU level:

1) Mandatory requirements which are common to all Member States which enable to channel action towards the 9 common CAP objectives (e.g. enhanced environmental and climate conditionality, mandatory support for young farmers). This concerns also the performance-related elements and procedures which link needs, to interventions, to result monitoring and are the same for all Member States.

2) A strong role for European institutions: The role of the European Commission does not only start when the CAP plans are officially submitted. I will make sure that the Commission services will continue exchanges with Member States for a proper preparation. This will be very valuable when it comes to assessing and approving the CAP plans of Member States. In this context, I will honour the commitment of President-elect, Ms von der Leyen, to a

strengthened special partnership with the European Parliament and I intend to regularly update the European Parliament on the implementation of the new policy.

3) An efficient governance and assurance framework. As regards the controls, the Commission proposal is building on an existing robust structure of governance bodies and control systems in the Member States. They are all working well, providing high level of assurance, as proven by the low error rates. Also for the future CAP, the Commission will remain ultimately responsible for the implementation of the CAP budget and will continuously provide a high level of assurance that it is well spent.

Finally, as regards the opinion of the European Court of Auditors, let me highlight the general support to a more performance-oriented and greener policy.

3.2 How also do you intend to lead as AGRI Commissioner on the Farm to Fork Strategy, which should serve as a genuine EU Food Policy, and what kind of coherence do you envisage between it and the ongoing debate on the CAP reform proposal?

As Commissioner for Agriculture I will contribute to the 'Farm to Fork' Strategy which is led by my colleague Stella Kyriakides. The Farm to Fork Strategy has to offer a holistic vision on how to make our food system sustainable, along the whole food chain. The Farm to Fork Strategy will support all three aspects of sustainability – economic, environment and climate, social and health. The reformed CAP will play a key role in achieving the ambitions of the 'Farm to Fork' strategy and will be an essential part of the strategy. See also the answer to question 5.

3.3 Delegating to Member States all responsibility for planning and strategy, including for climate and environmental measures gives power to the Commission to assess effectiveness and commonality of national strategic plans without the precise mandatory basic requirements being defined at European level. How then will European farmers be incentivised to move towards the achievement of common objectives, with adequate and fair remuneration to deliver improved environmental services and added value for the protection of climate, water, soil and biodiversity, to the benefit of the whole EU community?

The Commission has made a proposal that on the one hand confers a lot of responsibility on Member States in defining a national strategy, but which does that in a robust EU framework and subject to Commission supervision and approval.

Delegating responsibility is needed because of the nature of environmental issues that most often require tailor-made solutions that are not only more effective than a one-size-fits-all approach but also are more acceptable to the farmers as they allow addressing concrete environmental needs. It is clear that Member States do not have the same needs. And they do not all start from the same point, notably on emission reduction. It is clear that the tools intended to respond to the national/regional/local challenges must reflect the different situations: for instance promoting the re-establishment of natural pastures by decreasing agricultural activity constitutes an adequate response in certain areas, but is less of a solution in another area struggling with land abandonment with negative impacts on e.g. biodiversity.

As I said, the fact that Member States are deemed better placed to determine a strategy corresponding to their needs and strategic priorities, and designing in detail interventions does not mean that they have a free hand. Indeed, the objectives to which their strategy have to

respond are set at EU level. Essential features and principles of possible interventions that are there to ensure a level-playing field and to avoid a race to the bottom are set in EU legislation. Interventions, intended to incentivise farmers to do more for the environment and climate, will be based on a set of common mandatory basic requirements and a conditionality mechanism that are defined at European level. This ensures that all EU farmers committing to do more than those requirements will start from the same basis. The Strategic Plans will have to be prepared and discussed within Member States with relevant stakeholders/authorities such as those in charge of environmental and climate issues. These Plans will then be approved by the Commission. Plans will not only have to be in line with other relevant environment, climate and plant/animal health commitments Member States make under other related policies, but they will have to show how they contribute to targets and objectives of those commitments. Last but not least, at least 30% of rural development funds allocated to a plan will have to be spent on the CAP specific objectives regarding the environment and climate. All these features of the Commission Proposal for the future CAP will lead to an increased environmental and climate ambition of Member States' plans and the whole CAP post 2020.

Based on the above I am persuaded we need a balance between Member States responsibilities and those of the Commission. I will report regularly to the European Parliament on this issue, as part of what I believe must be a constant dialogue. The CAP proposal is based on the recognition that we have a common, shared responsibility, but that responses to challenges are to be differentiated to be effective.

3.4 The EU must continue to steer the policy towards more ambitious objectives, in the framework of the New Green Deal and other domains such as the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. Many MEPs believe that if we move away from compliance, we risk losing the current safeguards for the integrity and commonality of the future CAP. Following your comments in the hearing, are you ready to support an alternative approach, based on the current compliance system - that has proven effective (less than 3% error) and which ensures equal treatment and sound EU-wide implementation? How, specifically, will you move things towards such an alternative approach?

The new delivery model is at the heart of the Commission proposal and the approval of the CAP Strategic Plan by the Commission is a crucial step in order to guarantee that the policy is implemented according to the common objectives.. The shift from compliance to performance answers the criticisms of the European Court of Auditors, this Committee and others; everyone wants more performance! However, there is no benefit in adding yet another layer to the CAP implementation. This would only seriously increase the administrative burden and the costs of policy implementation in the Member States.

The Commission will not give the Member States a blank cheque. The Commission has built its proposal on the existing governance bodies and control systems, which have proven effective. These bodies, in their implementation of the CAP, will need to respect the basic EU requirements, which are the safeguards for the integrity and commonality of the future CAP! Your suggestions to improve the proposal and build safeguards in this respect are welcome. In parallel, in the new delivery model, assurance is obtained from Member States performance.

4.1 As regards the CAP as a vehicle to transition to sustainable farming systems everywhere: Do you intend to make new CAP proposals that would only reward sustainable farming systems favourable to biodiversity, which do not contribute to climate change, reduce livestock

densities to sustainable levels, introduce a compulsory crop rotation with leguminous crop to move away from imported feed? Will you bring forward a coherent program, which directs funding to small-scale farming in the EU?

The proposed common agricultural policy aims to make a substantial contribution to achieving the EU objectives on climate action, natural resources, biodiversity and animal welfare. I firmly believe that it provides the means to support European agriculture to meet as effectively as possible the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. To make this happen, the European Parliament and the Council must work together on negotiating the final CAP reform – with determined support from the Commission. Together we should ensure that we maximize the climate ambitions and minimise the environmental impact of the agricultural sector, making the best possible use of instruments proposed in the future CAP. For this, I am prepared to act as a broker between the co-legislator to build consensus.

I acknowledge that European agriculture faces very serious challenges with regard to the environment and climate. The recent international reports underline the pivotal role that the agricultural sector will have to play in this respect. I believe the Commission's proposal is up to this ambition: it covers environmental and climate challenges with clear objectives and the whole approach will be more results-based than at present, and more adapted to local challenges and realities. This is why I will work closely with Executive Vice-President - designate Timmermans – and the European Parliament – in making sure agriculture is an integral part of the European Green Deal.

There will be much stronger links between the CAP and delivering on the objectives and targets of EU legislation on the environment and climate – on climate change, energy, water, air quality, biodiversity, and pesticides.

The new system of conditionality will establish essential basic standards to be met by farmers, including a compulsory crop rotation. It will offer enough flexibility so that Member States can effectively meet the challenges on their territory. But it will also provide strong common elements between Member States.

Important new instruments will be available. Within the first Pillar, eco-schemes will provide a new stream of funding to be spent on care for the environment and climate. These eco-schemes will provide a new way to incentivise a shift to more eco-friendly farming, on a large scale.

A wide range of important tools – relevant to the environment and climate - will remain available under the CAP's second pillar. These will include area-based environmental payments for agriculture (and forestry). They will also include support for investments, training, innovation and co-operation.

Overall, each Member State will be legally obliged to show greater ambition over the environment and climate than in the current period, ensuring that at least 40% of the CAP's overall budget will contribute to climate action and a minimum 30% of the rural development pillar will go to climate and environment-related objectives.

I believe that this proposal offers the potential for a future CAP that performs very well with regard to the environment and climate. I hope that the Parliament and the Council will see that potential as they negotiate on the future CAP. I promise my full support in this process, and

that can help farmers to transition to a more sustainable model of farming, at an acceptable pace for them.

On direct support to small farms, please see question 6.

4.2 If you stick to the new delivery model, when assessing the strategic plans, how will you ensure that Member States who are reluctant to spend 40% of CAP budget on climate and environment, e.g. through mandatory eco-schemes, actually do so in a proper and effective way? In either scenario, how will you increase ambition and what methods do you have to hold Member States accountable on international climate and development commitments?

The Commission proposal establishes that each CAP strategic plan has to allocate at least 30% of the Pillar II budget for interventions dedicated to climate and environment. Overall, the overall climate contribution of the whole CAP financial envelope is set at 40%.

Already in the present CAP, at least 30% of the budget for rural development have to be set aside for climate and environment. Only those rural development plans compliant with this requirement were approved by the Commission. The future CAP will further raise this ambition by excluding from the 30% payments to Areas subject to Natural Constraints (ANC). In the CAP proposal, the national CAP Strategic Plans must also be approved by the Commission.

The Commission will have to examine each Member State's CAP Plan and assess whether this obligation had been met. This will be an absolute priority for me. To do so, the Commission would take the whole range of elements listed in the proposal into account. One of these elements would be each Member State's planned allocation of its CAP budget. But other elements would also be extremely important. For instance, the proposal establishes that each Plan will have to show an "increased ambition" with regard to the climate and environment compared to the present situation. Moreover, the Plans should show how the combination of the various interventions (the standards of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition, the eco-schemes, and agri-environment-climate or forestry commitments in Pillar II), the allocation of resources, milestones and targets respond to the environmental and climate challenges and needs. The latter should take in particular account the relevant national environmental and climate plans, as well as objectives and targets therein stemming from EU climate and environmental legislation.

The proposal establishes also a transparent process for the preparation of the Plan at national level, with the involvement of the competent authorities and in partnership with stakeholders. Commission would approve the CAP Plan only when satisfied that the Plan as a whole showed sufficient ambition with regard to climate change and environment. In the implementation phase, the proposal also foresees a robust mechanism of monitoring and evaluation steps at national and EU levels. Revision of the Plans and then sanctions are also foreseen in case of underperformance. I will ensure that we use all of the tools at our disposal.

4.3 How will you ensure gender mainstreaming throughout the CAP?

I am convinced that women play an indispensable role in employment and economic growth in agriculture and rural areas. The proposal for the new CAP fully recognises this contribution. One of the CAP specific objective refers to the promotion of employment, growth and social inclusion. I welcome that COMAGRI included explicitly gender equality in this objective.

When dealing with this objective Member States will have to address the needs of women in rural areas.

CAP Strategic Plans can provide many opportunities to design and target specific interventions to identified needs of specific beneficiaries. In the case of women in rural areas, this includes rural development support, for example, for the development of basic services in rural areas, local development strategies, (LEADER), business start-up, knowledge acquisition and training, cooperation projects etc.

Finally, together with the Vice-President for Democracy and Demography and with the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms will develop a vision for rural areas, which will ensure that these areas remain vital and dynamic. It is necessary to provide job opportunities for both rural men and women and to offer an attractive future for our rural citizens in order to support them in facing up to their own unique set of challenges.

4.4 Will you ensure that funding from the Rural Development Programme will still be linked to the cohesion fund through the common provisions regulation?

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is part of the CAP. With the new delivery model, the two agricultural funds, EAFRD and EAGF (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund) are brought together in a joint strategic framework for simpler, better targeted and coherent action.

The new legislative set-up will lead to a clearly defined, consistent and coherent single set of rules for the CAP as a whole, in view of simplification and policy performance

In light of the different mechanisms to deliver support, crossing the “single rule book” for the EAFRD and EAGF with the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) would lead to increased complexity and unnecessary bureaucracy. I am aware that COMAGRI largely shares this view

Still, the CPR provides for common provisions for EAFRD and European Structural and Investment Funds in those policy areas where harmonisation is possible without increasing complexity (e.g. financial instruments, territorial development or communication).

Complementarities among the EAFRD and other funds under shared management will be ensured in any case in the programming documents presented by Member States to the Commission such as Partnership Agreements, CAP Strategic Plans (CAP SP) and the Cohesion policy programmes.

4.5 How will you use the CAP to help farmers adapt to climate change, boosting resilience of agroecosystems, notably by deepening topsoil and integrating agroforestry?

A report from the European Environment Agency recently stressed that the EU farm sector is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. It needs to adapt. Particularly in the agricultural sector, adaptation and mitigation go hand in hand.

Under the Commission’s proposal for the future CAP, one of the CAP’s objectives is specifically about climate change adaptation. The enhanced conditionality includes several elements that will support the adaptation of the sector. For instance, standards on the protection

of organic soil, on crop rotation, on area devoted to non-productive features, and on soil erosion.

The increased subsidiarity and flexibility granted to Member States will allow for tailoring their intervention logic to the very specific needs and challenges on the ground and to make their respective agricultural sectors more resilient to climate change.

In addition, the proposed future CAP will support a very wide range of farming practices and changes that would contribute to climate change adaptation. For example, a farmer could be supported to invest in more efficient irrigation, diversify his crops, convert to precision farming or take part in risk management schemes. Furthermore, nature-based solutions as well as agroforestry will be fully eligible for CAP support.

But we need to continue increasing the uptake of such beneficial solutions. This is why we need to strengthen the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) and continue with the great work of the EIP-AGRI, which allows for the co-creation of knowledge between farmers and the scientific community. Research, innovation, innovation partnership and knowledge transfer have a key role as well.

I will work closely with Executive Vice-President designate Timmermans, in his work on climate action, to continue to promote additional climate change adaptation measures across all rural areas.

In conclusion, I believe that the Commission's proposal for a future CAP offers great potential with regard to adaptation to climate change. I hope that the Parliament and the Council will see that potential as they negotiate on the future CAP. I promise my full support in this process.

4.6 Given it is already possible using Integrated Pest Management to cut use of pesticides by between 30-50%, will you push a target of 50% pesticide use reduction by 2025?

The Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, which is the responsibility of my colleague Commissioner-designate Stella Kyriakides, provides a strong framework for Member States and farmers to reduce their dependency on pesticides, and within this framework integrated pest management is indeed a valuable tool. Implementation has yielded some good results but it has also faced certain issues on implementation. DG SANTE and other Commission services concerned, including DG AGRI, are currently examining possible changes to the system to make it respond better. I will support this work that will continue under the Farm to Fork Strategy. To achieve a higher ambition Member States first need to be encouraged to implement in full the provisions of the Directive.

In line with President-elect von der Leyen's views, I believe that a collegiate cross cutting approach is necessary to achieve this. While the current CAP already includes a number of very useful instruments, which contribute to our overall objective of reducing farmer dependency on pesticides, the Commission's post-2020 CAP proposal increases our level of ambition and introduces further initiatives. These include the introduction of crop rotation and the Sustainable Use Directive in conditionality, the reinforcement of farm advice and further targeted provisions on the Sustainable Use Directive. A particularly relevant tool proposed are the Eco-schemes, that have a huge potential inciting farmers to change practices reducing pesticide dependency of farms and enhancing biodiversity. These are concrete elements within

the reform proposals of the CAP to encourage farmers to reduce the use of pesticides in plant production.

I believe we should work together on how to speed up the reduction of pesticide dependency, and look at how we can do more to encourage a switch to lower risk and non-chemical alternatives.

I am confident that with our combined approaches we will make progress with Member States and farmers. The European Green Deal, the CAP and the EU farmers will have to play their role. I believe that the set of tools proposed for the CAP post 2020 would allow doing it. In line with the mission that President-elect von der Leyen tasked me with, I am fully committed to ensure the necessary transition of EU farming towards more sustainability and a lesser dependence on pesticides.

5.1 As regards the contribution of agriculture to the European Green Deal: What needs to be changed in the current CAP reform to ensure that agriculture contributes its fair share to the achievement of the objectives of the Paris Agreement and international commitments on biodiversity and that farmers are incentivised to adopt more environmentally and climate friendly practices?

Looking at the latest international reports on climate change and biodiversity, the environmental and climate challenges remain significant and agriculture is one of the sectors most involved. But I want to see farmers and rural communities as being part of the solution rather than part of the problem. First, let me underline that already the present CAP is contributing significantly to priorities related to climate and environment. For instance, through the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes, around 80 million ha of agricultural land and close to 8 million ha of forests will have received funding for restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems – a total budget of around € 45 billion.

However, it is clear that much more has to be done for achieving our objectives and commitments linked to climate and biodiversity, and I believe the Commission's proposal for the CAP post-2020 offers a response to those challenges.

The key innovation in the Commission proposal is a new delivery model, which will replace the existing one-size-fits-all approach with a more flexible system. This new approach will allow greater freedom at national level to decide how best to meet common EU-wide objectives while responding to the specific challenges and needs. The proposed new delivery model will provide Member States with the flexibility required to design interventions that most adequately fit their local situations and needs, which is essential for climate and environment which are in most cases site-specific; it also allows to better contribute to the national climate and biodiversity priorities, strategies and targets stemming from EU legislation.

I hope that the Parliament and the Council will see that potential as they negotiate on the future CAP. I promise my full support in this process.

During my mandate, I will do my best to ensure that the EU agriculture and forestry will make a significant contribution for achieving our climate and environmental objectives, working closely as part of the team delivering on the European Green Deal.

5.2 How do you see the link between the CAP reform and the Farm to Fork Strategy and how would this translate into concrete measures?

The Farm to Fork strategy will be an important component of the European Green Deal. It will be a strategy for achieving sustainability along the whole food chain. The Farm to Fork Strategy will have to support all three aspects of sustainability – economic, environment and climate, social and health.

The future CAP will play a key role to achieve ambitions of the ‘Farm to Fork’ Strategy.

Firstly, I strongly believe that to support basic economic sustainability of farming, the CAP must continue to offer income support to farmers, as is the case in the proposals on the table.

Moreover, the CAP reform proposals provide a higher ambition in terms of environmental sustainability. Not only through new mandatory requirements to the beneficiaries of direct support and a minimum level of 30% of rural development pillar spending on climate and environment-related objectives. But particularly through incentives for farmers under the first pillar eco-schemes and second pillar measures.

Social sustainability will be pursued via the interventions linked to the objectives of vibrant rural areas, generational renewal and societal demands on food and health, in particular in relation to animal welfare, antibiotic and pesticide use.

Concrete measures will be prepared by Member States, in the spirit of the proposed reform. To give an example; in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions a Member State can maintain peatland via an eco-scheme, stimulate soil carbon content via an environmental and climate commitment, reduce fertiliser use by stimulating organic farming (again an environmental and climate commitment), provide training using another type of intervention, etc.

5.3 What would be the concrete contribution of agriculture to a circular economy?

Promoting circular economy is of utmost importance to protect the environment and fight against climate change and biodiversity loss while boosting EU’s business competitiveness and placing them at the forefront in a globalised economy.

Agriculture and forestry play an important role in the circular economy, by supplying fully recyclable raw bio-materials and by contributing to recycle part of organic materials produced by our economy.

Agriculture and forestry have the potential to absorb carbon from the atmosphere through soil and biomass and sustainably supply biomass for the development of the bio-economy. The biomass can be used to produce a wide range of products (construction materials, wood, furniture, paper, fibres and textiles, enzymes, bio-chemicals, bioplastics, biofuels, etc.). This would create an expanding carbon pool and enable to substitute fossil-based materials with fully recyclable materials. The bio-economy can also offer opportunities to better valorise materials and by-products that are today discarded in processing supply chains.

On the other hand, agriculture can also make good use of products that today are discarded by the following parts of the food supply chain, including consumers. For instance, food waste that can be made safe for animal consumption could be used as feedstuffs; or processed into compost to be used as organic fertilisers or into biogas and energy, together with manure.

Nutrients extracted from urban wastes can also be used as crop fertilisers, thus replacing mineral fertilisers.

The present Commission has issued a set of initiatives that facilitate the role of agriculture to the circular economy, notably the newly adopted Fertiliser Regulation (which promotes an EU market for organic fertilisers and bio-stimulants), the amended Waste Directive (with a section on food waste), the proposal on water re-use (which will create an additional source of water in dry regions), as well as the bio-economy strategy and the sustainability scheme for bioenergy.

As stated by the President-elect, the European Green Deal will further foster the circular economy in the EU. The future CAP, providing more flexibility to the Member States in the design of their own interventions, will be an opportunity to support the role of agriculture in the circular economy through concrete initiatives on the ground. The Farm to Fork Strategy will also be a significant contributor to this exercise.

6.1 DG AGRI has played and plays a crucial role in defining EU agriculture and forestry. In view of this, how do you intend to achieve your objectives without the state aid unit in your Directorate-General?

What is important above all is that clear rules are in place that allow Member States to support the agricultural sector notably in times of crises. In that regard, the Commission has recently adopted a significant increase of *de minimis* aid in the agricultural sector. The other State aid related instruments have also always been elaborated in very close cooperation between the different Commissioners in charge of Agriculture and Rural Development on the one hand and for Competition on the other. In that light, the organisational change envisaged by the President elect does not affect the overall responsibility of the Commission as a collegiate body in the field of State aid. By working closely together, we will ensure that we have the necessary resources and expertise to ensure the rules are fully enforced.

In this spirit, there will be close cooperation between the Executive Vice-President for Europe fit for the Digital Age and myself as well as between the two Directorate Generals concerned in order to ensure consistency between State aid planned by the Member States and the sectoral policy of the EU. Due account will be taken of the need to bring the Common Agricultural and the Common Fisheries Policies, as specified in the mission letters of the President elect to the two colleagues concerned, to a success, notably through State aid rules that continue to be coherent with the common policies in these two areas.

But let me draw your attention to a very important provision of the Treaty, namely Article 42, according to which it is for the co-legislators, i.e. the EP and the Council, to determine to what extent State aid rules apply in the agricultural sector. The co-legislators have indeed decided that most of the aid that is partly or wholly financed in the agricultural sector from the EU-budget is per se excluded from State aid control. That competence of the co-legislators is in no way affected by this change. Within the collegial responsibility, it will be part of my portfolio to assess whether and to what extent the College may want to submit related legislative proposals to the co-legislators.

6.2 How do you intend to ensure that the transitional regulation is designed to gradually prepare Member State administrations for the new delivery model?

Our first aim, and my first priority, is a timely agreement on the reformed CAP. This will allow; Member States and Commission to have more time to prepare the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plans. This is absolutely essential.

Of course, I also believe it is essential there is continuity to ensure peace of mind for all those who benefit for the CAP. I want to work closely with you on this. As you know, in 2013 a transitional regulation was adopted for the CAP reform. At that time, transitional rules were particularly useful for those areas of the CAP where measures have a multiannual character.

I want to highlight that the Commission services are already working intensively with the Member States to facilitate the preparation of the CAP strategic plans. And let's not forget that the current CAP provides, under the second pillar, for resources for the technical assistance that can be used for preparing the new programming period, not only for Rural Development types of interventions but for the whole Strategic Plan.

I see it as a priority to ensure there is sufficient time after the political agreement on the future CAP to have rules in place to facilitate the move to the new system and to support to Member States implement the new delivery model.

6.3 How will you handle the risk of double-standards, when sustainability requirements coming from finance sector might differ from the existing legislation's sustainability criteria on woody biomass or CAP as far as sustainable finance regulation and taxonomy is concerned?

The Commission proposal for a Regulation on Sustainable Finance is currently in negotiation with the European Parliament and the Council. It would allow the Commission to adopt a delegated act on the taxonomy and sustainability criteria to be used in the financial sector. The purpose of the taxonomy and sustainability criteria in the financial sector is to provide an instrument to investors for classifying the degree of sustainability of their investments in economic activities.

The sustainability requirements in the CAP primarily aim to ensure that the biomass produced meet the relevant legal standards and provide also environmental and climate-related benefits through the respect of compulsory good agricultural and environmental conditions. These benefits include reduced air pollution.

In addition, the sustainability requirements in the Renewable Energy Directive are meant to ensure that the biomass produced for renewable energy does not cause harm to the environment and do not generate losses of carbon that would undermine the greenhouse gas saving by the use of bioenergy, which is the main purpose of this directive.

I will work closely within the College in order to avoid overlapping and inconsistencies when it comes to sustainability criteria.

6.4 Will you favour small and medium sized farms on behalf of big farms? You repeatedly said that small and medium sized farms are best equipped to produce sustainable products and combat climate change. What is the proof of this statement?

My duty as Agricultural Commissioner would be to take care of all types of farms, be it small, medium or big. Undoubtedly, small and family farms require more public support and their

contribution is fundamental to achieving the overall sustainability objective in all its dimensions (economic, environmental, social and territorial) and meeting societal demands.

6.5 Can you confirm that future Eco schemes will reward farmers and those rewards can go beyond the cost coverage principle applied in pillar 2 of the CAP?

First of all, let me confirm that this support focusing on sustainable agricultural practices allows Member States to offer amounts of payment that may be higher than a mere compensation of cost incurred and income foregone.

I believe that this possibility reflects the potential we see in farming. Eco-schemes have been designed as a game changer. It is the novel tool that will encourage as many farmers as possible to adopt agricultural practices that will be favourable to climate, biodiversity and natural resources and that will contribute to the overarching objectives on pesticide reduction to be fleshed out in the future Farm to Fork Strategy and on climate change mitigation based on Member States commitments. It will allow farmers to become actors of the Green Deal.

Finally let me reassure you that while the proposal confers Member States the necessary leeway so that they design schemes that fit national conditions and respond to local needs, rules are there to ensure the support remains focused on genuine farmers performing agricultural practices on land eligible to direct payments. I will defend this principle during future talks so that funds stay in the farming sector where they are very much needed.

7/ Do you agree with the reduction of CAP expenditure as it is proposed in the Draft Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2021-2027?

The Commission proposal presented in May 2018 on the Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027 is a good basis. It must be seen in the broader context. I believe the proposal strikes a fair and reasonable balance between the need for ensuring adequate funding for new priorities and for the more traditional policies like the common agricultural policy and cohesion. Moreover, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, an important net contributor the EU budget, had to be taken into account in the proposal.

In this challenging context, the Commission proposed only a moderate cut for the common agricultural policy. The proposal allows maintaining the pivotal role of the direct payments to support European farmers, going further with the convergence of direct payments between Member States and keeping an adequate level of public support for rural development. In addition, the proposed increase to national co-financing under rural development, in line with what is proposed under cohesion policy, will ensure that sufficient money is available for farmers on the ground.

I consider that the proposal put on the table by the current Commission is a good basis for the MFF negotiations. We must find a compromise acceptable to all, with overall the aim to have a modern and ambitious EU budget addressing both traditional challenges and new priorities. As the Commissioner for agriculture I will defend a strong budget for agriculture.

