State of play of farmland concentration in the EU: how to facilitate the access to land for farmers

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted an own-initiative report by Maria NOICHL (S&D, DE) on the state of play of farmland concentration in the EU: how to facilitate the access to land for farmers.

The report recalled that there is no exclusive or shared competence of the EU on land, as various EU policies deploy different political, social, cultural and environmental aspects of land management. This creates the need for a more holistic approach to land governance at EU level.

In 2013, in the 27-member EU, only 3.1 % of farms controlled 52.2 % of farmland in Europe. By contrast, in 2013, 76.2 % of farms had the use of only 11.2 % of the agricultural land. This places inequality of land use in the EU.

Too high a concentration of agricultural land splits society, destabilises rural areas, threatens food safety and thus jeopardises the environmental and social objectives of Europe.

Farmland management: the report noted that there is a **general shortage of comprehensive, transparent, up-to-date, high-value data** standardised at European level on price and volume movements on the European land market.

Member States are called upon to take better account of farmland conservation and management, and to transfers of land in their public policies. They should regularly communicate to each other information about their national legislation regarding land, land use changes and, in particular, cases involving speculative land purchases. They should also create harmonised **farmland inventories** in which all ownership rights, and rights of use in respect of farm land, are recorded in an up-to-date, accurate and comprehensible manner – while fully respecting the data protection rights of the parties involved – and presented in the form of anonymised, publicly accessible statistics.

The Commission is called upon to:

- establish an **observatory service** for the collection of information and data on the level of farmland concentration throughout the Union;
- set up a high-level **task force** to examine the problem of farmland concentration, to conduct a study on the impact that the policy measures taken by the EU and the Member States have on land concentration and agricultural production, and to analyse the risks that land concentration poses for food supply, employment, the environment, soil quality and rural development;
- publish **guidelines** on the harmonisation of accounting practices, and to encourage the sharing of best practices in national legislations, in order to identify measures to safeguard farmland and farm activities.

Financing: high investment costs hamper the acquisition and leasing of farmland and forested area for small to medium-sized family and cooperative farms. Members stressed the difficulties of accessing credit

in order to acquire land or tenure, especially for new entrants and young farmers and called on the Commission to provide proper instruments, in the framework of the CAP and related policies, that facilitate their entry into farming by ensuring fair access to sustainable credit.

According to Members, farmland should to be given special protection with a view to allowing the Member States, in coordination with local authorities and farmers' organisations, to regulate the sale, use and lease of agricultural land in order to ensure food security.

CAP involvement: although land policy is essentially a matter for the Member States, it may be affected by the CAP, with serious impact on the competitiveness of farms on the internal market. Member States are called upon to give small and medium-sized local producers, new entrants and **young farmers** – while ensuring **equal gender access** – priority in the purchase and rental of farmland. Member stated must undertake a **targeted examination** of the national implementation of the existing CAP with a view to identifying any undesirable effects of the concentration of land.

In this regard, they welcomed the proposal to **simplify the CAP**, in particular those measures aimed at reducing costs and administrative burdens for family farms, as well as for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas.

They stated that, under the reformed CAP, ceilings should be introduced, and the direct payments scheme adjusted, in such a way as to give added weight to the first hectares, and that steps should be taken to facilitate investment and the disbursement of **direct aid to small farms**. The Commission is called on to introduce a **more effective aid redistribution** system in order to guard against farmland concentration.