Ensuring food security and the long-term resilience of EU agriculture

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted the own-initiative report by Marlene MORTLER (EPP, DE) on ensuring food security and long-term resilience of EU agriculture.

Challenges to the EU food sector

The COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of the crisis caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine have put food security and the resilience of the global food system at the centre of the political agenda. They have exposed structural problems in the European agricultural sector and pose significant risks to Member States' agricultural markets, especially those geographically closest to the war. European food production must therefore be considered a strategic sector and be placed on an equal footing with energy security, defence and the fight against climate change at the EU and international levels.

The common agricultural policy (CAP) has made a positive contribution to strengthening the CAP's role in European agriculture in the 60 years it has been in place and should continue to do so in future with budgetary support that is sufficient and extensive enough to guarantee food security and supply in Europe.

Members highlighted the need for the EU to strengthen its food security, strategic autonomy and the resilience of its farming sector and entire supply chain by reducing dependence on imports from outside the EU and by diversifying supply of critical production imports such as fertiliser, feed and raw materials. Supply chains must not become a geopolitical tool to destabilise and jeopardise food security at global level and short and regional supply chains should be improved in a sustainable manner.

The Commission is called on to present without delay a **holistic strategic plan** to ensure food security for the EU, which could include the use of strategic food stocks. Members also stressed the need to identify **new financial support** to ensure European and third country food security.

Sustainable and resilient agriculture

Members stressed that the central importance of the agricultural and food sectors in the economy and in providing decent and sustainable job opportunities with safe working conditions in rural areas.

The Commission is called on to:

- take the necessary measures to provide production planning security for farmers, as well as adequate financial resources and guarantees, making it possible to maintain and, if necessary, increase food production, strengthen sustainable farming systems, increase the diversity of EU food crops and increase product quality, while rejecting artificial, industrial imitations;

- ensure that farmland remains available primarily for sustainable the production of food and feed since this land contributes to biodiversity conservation while also contributing to food security and can also help reduce EU energy dependence;

- take particular account of **highly efficient farming models** in areas with fertile agricultural land where food is produced sustainably;

- avoid a situation where European farmers face unfair competition from imports that do not meet EU standards.

Generational renewal

Concerned about the decline in numbers of farms and farm managers in combination with the increased average age of European farmers, Members called on the Commission to develop an ambitious, comprehensive EU strategy on generational renewal in the agricultural sector, aiming to increase the number of young farmers, improve their competences and skills, in particular for fully harnessing the opportunities offered by smart farming and artificial intelligence.

New cultivation methods

According to Members, the EU should speed up the adoption of legislation on the use of **new breeding techniques** in partnership with the Member States, while complying with the precautionary principle in order to sustainably increase yields and make crops more resilient to climate change and new pathogens, particularly in view of harmful organisms, droughts, floods, water shortages and other extreme weather conditions that are afflicting an increasing number of EU Member States.

Pesticides

Members condemned the EU's **double standards** on pesticides, which enable the export from the EU of hazardous substances which are themselves banned in the EU. They called on the Commission to ensure reciprocity in international trade agreements, particularly for agriculture and agricultural products.

Food supply chain

The report emphasised that the Commission must take additional measures to develop a more resilient, transparent and fairer food chain, in particular by strengthening the position of primary producers in the whole food supply chain. Member States and the Commission are called on to ensure the effective enforcement of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive and to consider measures to combat food speculation.

Fertiliser strategy

Highlighting that the fertilisers sector is essential to guaranteeing food security globally, the Commission is called on to set out a long-term vision for achieving strategic autonomy in fertilisers in order to incentivise the industry to reorient to more sustainable production methods.