



Brussels
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Dear Petitioner,

Thank you for your message of 5 March 2024 to President von der Leyen. I have been asked to answer to you on her behalf.

I would first like to thank you for reaching out and sharing your ideas and concerns. The European Union's farmers and farming sector play a pivotal role in ensuring the supply of high quality, safe, and nutritious food for all Europeans, while also boosting rural economies and contributing to the green transition.

At the same time, recent farmers' protests across Europe highlight the significant challenges faced by the sector. I wish to reassure you that the Commission recognises that these are major and for some farmers even existential challenges and that they can count on European support.

Regarding **agricultural trade**, the Commission strives to reach agreements that are mutually beneficial for all trading partners, while respecting our commitments to fair competition and sustainability. With the Commission's new trade agenda, all new EU trade agreements will incorporate comprehensive chapters on trade and sustainable development to make sure that European producers respecting EU environmental standards are not disadvantaged.

For example, our recently concluded trade agreement with New Zealand includes such unprecedented sustainability commitments. It also protects EU farmers by including import quotas for sensitive sectors such as dairy and beef and by extending the protection of EU wines and spirits that have a Geographical Indication, including Polish Vodka, to New Zealand.

This trade agreement is also expected to create new export opportunities for EU farmers, notably by eliminating tariffs for EU pigmeat and dairy exports. Indeed, a certain degree of open trade strengthens the resilience of EU agriculture and can present important economic opportunities for EU producers. A recent study by the Commission's Joint Research Centre shows that the potential conclusion of ten upcoming free trade agreements could significantly boost the export and producer prices for European dairy, pigmeat, wines and spirits.

In the case of **Ukraine**, the Commission has proposed to renew the suspension of import duties and quotas on Ukrainian exports to the EU for another year. It is important to

remember that the aim of these measures is to help alleviate the difficult situation faced by Ukrainian producers and exporters as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression.

At the same time, to address farmers' concerns regarding market competition, we have proposed to include an emergency brake and a reinforced safeguard mechanism that puts ceilings on three sensitive products: poultry, eggs, and sugar. This will minimise the potential pressure of Ukrainian imports on EU producers.

Lastly, regarding our **environmental ambitions**, we believe that sustainability and economic competitiveness need to go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, the shift to more sustainable agriculture will bring long-term benefits to Europe's farming community by making it more resilient.

However, we are also very aware that farmers need support to be able to shift to more sustainable farming practices. The new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has made important progress in this regard by increasing funding and support for greener farming models. At the same time, we also realise that certain adjustments to our current policies are necessary in order to reduce the administrative burden for farmers.

Here, the Commission is working to implement a range of concrete short and medium-term actions to respond to farmers' concerns. This includes the Commission proposal, adopted on 15 March, related to conditionality and CAP Strategic Plans, which aim to reduce the burden related to controls for EU farmers, and provide them with greater flexibility for complying with certain environmental conditionalities. Notably, these proposals include exempting small farms of under 10 hectares from controls and penalties related to compliance with conditionality requirements. This will significantly reduce the administrative burden related to controls for small farmers who represent 65% of CAP beneficiaries, and less than 10% of agricultural area.

In line with these measures, we have recently launched an **online survey** to gather the views of farmers on their perceived sources of administrative burden and complexity stemming from CAP rules as well as other rules for food and agriculture. The survey is open from 7 March to 8 April and is available in all EU languages. If you have not done so already, I highly encourage you to participate in the survey and give us your feedback. The survey is available under this link: [EUSurvey - Survey \(europa.eu\)](#).

Furthermore, I am pleased to share with you that we are currently preparing a range of short, medium and longer-term actions to improve the position of farmers in the food chain. It covers issues such as market transparency, governance, enforcement and, if needed, improvement of the relevant legislation.

I hope that these elements help to address the concerns that you raise in your message.

Yours faithfully,

Electronically signed

Wolfgang BURTSCHER