

ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE
Janusz WOJCIECHOWSKI
Commissioner-designate for Agriculture

1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence

What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?

As someone who has been personally and professionally connected to the realities of rural life from an early age, I feel a strong commitment to providing safe and affordable food for our citizens and a fair standard of living for our farmers. Coming from a rural part of Poland, I am a firm believer in the need to support our rural communities.

My background is in law, politics and public audit. In Poland, I was a judge at regional and provincial level before being appointed to the Court of Appeal and the High Court of Justice. I was a Member of the Polish Parliament, where I served as Deputy Speaker. I was selected to be President of the Polish Supreme Audit Office, a post I held for six years. In 2004, I was elected as a Member of the European Parliament. During my time at the Parliament, I was substitute member of the Committee on Budgets, a Member of several delegations to neighbouring countries and a Member of the Committee on Budgetary Control. I was Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development from 2004 to 2016 and President of the European Parliament's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals. In 2016, I was appointed to the European Court of Auditors in Luxembourg.

As a Member of the European Parliament, I was very much engaged with the issues of animal welfare, food prices and the labelling of organic foodstuffs. I saw for myself that issues linked to agriculture and rural development are very sensitive, as they touch our citizens directly. I learned how important it is to listen to different voices. I also sensed the strong common desire among Members of Parliament to work together in tackling the many challenges facing the agriculture sector, and to find solutions together.

At the Court of Auditors, I continued to work on agriculture-related files. I was the Member responsible for reports on measures to support Young Farmers, on Animal Welfare, on the Rural Development Programming and on the system for protecting our citizens from chemical

hazards in their food. I was also responsible for an important report which highlighted the human and economic costs of poor air quality.

But I am not someone who has only observed the agricultural sector from a distance. I was born and brought up in a rural area with a long farming tradition. I developed a feeling for what it is like to work on the land. I believe that is something a person has to experience for himself or herself if they are to understand farmers.

I would regard it as an honour and a privilege to support President-elect von der Leyen's open, inclusive and cooperative way of working, working with her and the College to uphold the priorities of the European Union and tackle the challenges that lie ahead. I will strive to work for the prosperity of our farmers and of people living in rural areas.

President-elect von der Leyen has put gender equality high on her agenda and committed to lead by example by forming a fully gender-balanced College. I intend to apply the same principle to my team. I also believe that strengthened application of gender mainstreaming in policy-making makes better use of resources, makes policy more efficient, supports sustainable development and creates fairer societies. This is very pertinent to my portfolio as less than one third of farms in the EU are managed by women and I will strive to improve this.

Throughout my time as a public servant, I have been very much aware of the importance of avoiding any position or situation that would call into question my independence, my impartiality or my availability. As a Member of the European Court of Auditors, I have been scrupulous in meeting my obligations towards the institution, both in regard to my declarations of financial interest and my obligation to act in the European interest without taking any instructions. I will continue to exercise the greatest care in avoiding or resolving any situation that might interfere with the performance of my duties.

2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament

How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments? What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

I am honoured to be offered the opportunity to take on this role at a crucial moment for the EU and for the future of European agriculture. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will be of key importance for the future of our farmers and of our citizens. We need to respond to their demands. We need to provide a modern, effective and simplified policy; we need to become a carbon-neutral continent and to deal with climate change; we need a long-term vision for our rural areas. Achieving the right balance among these objectives will be a central part of my role. This cannot be done in isolation. I see my portfolio at the crossroads of many policies and I intend to work with my colleagues in the College in the spirit of cooperation that is at the heart of the President's-elect vision. I will also be ready to contribute

as necessary to the work of my colleagues in the College on the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020 and in the international arena.

From my previous experience both as a Member of the European Parliament and as a Member of the European Court of Auditors, I bring with me a comprehensive, first-hand understanding of the importance of responsibility and accountability inside the EU institutions and between them. As the Member responsible for an audit report, the buck stopped with me, even though the report was endorsed by all the Members of the Court. EU policy making is a complex process, with the Commission working with two co-legislators acting on an equal footing. I am fully prepared to take political responsibility for actions in the field of agriculture and rural development, while at the same time working with my fellow Members of the College and respecting the principle of collegiality. I am very much aware of what the Parliament will rightly expect from me in terms of open, regular and frank reporting. At the Commission, the President-elect has set out very clearly how she wishes the various Commissioners whose policy areas fall within the European Green deal to relate to one another. I am ready to play my part in that to the full.

I firmly believe that transparency is essential to strengthen the democratic legitimacy and sustainability of the EU and to earn the trust of its citizens. At a personal level, I will make public all my contacts and meetings with professional organisations or individuals on any matters relating to EU policy in accordance with the applicable rules of the Commission. At an institutional level, I will work with the Parliament in a spirit of openness and cooperation, strengthening the partnership between us.

Twelve years as a Member of the European Parliament instilled in me an acute awareness of the importance of equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council, and of the strong links between the European Parliament and the Commission. I will pay close attention to the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making and I fully endorse the President's-elect commitment to support a right of initiative for the European Parliament.

Questions from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

- 1. In June 2018 the European Commission put forward proposals for a new CAP. It is an important reform where we have the possibility to strengthen competitiveness for the sector and also deliver more on the environment. What is the position of the Commissioner-designate on the proposed files and more specifically the New Delivery Model and its Strategic Plans? Does the Commissioner-designate intend to change elements of the proposals, and if so how? Does the Commissioner-designate plan to tighten and strengthen the controls in order to guarantee that Member States achieve common European objectives, justify public spending and assure a European level playing field? How can the future CAP maintain the number of farmers and ensure generational renewal? What is your long-term vision for agriculture and rural areas?**

The President-elect has announced a European Green Deal. It gives a clear ambition for the EU: to become the first climate-neutral continent, to preserve Europe's natural environment and to move towards a zero-pollution ambition. European agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must play a key role in this process. The European Green Deal will

set the vision and the strategy for European farming for decades to come. I will make sure that the contribution of European agriculture is ambitious, fair and based on evidence.

Europe's farmers are making an important contribution to our society in terms of food production, provision of climate and environmental services and as part of wider rural areas, whose communities play a fundamental role for our European socio-economic fabric and cultural diversity. Providing affordable food for our citizens and a fair standard of living for our farmers is one of Europe's founding missions. Now is the time to discuss with our farmers what sort of farming their children will inherit, what farming should look like by the middle of this century, and how we get to this point together.

Important challenges are faced by the agricultural sector, which is undergoing profound transformations: the on-going globalisation process, the changes in the climate, the shifts in consumer patterns, the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to better protect our natural resources and to pay ever greater attention to the protection of human and animal health.

All these elements require strong action at European level, with a long-term perspective, to support our farming community to adapt to a changing world. In parallel, we need to focus on making our farming more sustainable and on mitigating negative impacts on our climate and our environment.

I firmly believe that the CAP has been fundamental in preserving Europe's family farming model, and will continue to be crucial to allow our farmers to adapt to new challenges in a successful way. EU agriculture is increasingly exposed to the effects of climate change and vulnerable to changes in global markets. Therefore, we need to focus our efforts on providing certainty and stability to our farmers, because food in Europe will only be produced if our farmers can make a decent living for their families. We need a policy that supports viable farm income and resilience across the territories and that improves our competitiveness and transforms agriculture into an attractive activity for young people.

However, we can only achieve this if we make our policy more effective and put in place a fairer system of support that guarantees that public resources go where they are most needed. I support mandatory rules at EU level to redistribute direct support and make it degressive to the benefit of smaller family farms. Moreover, our young farmers also need more targeted support to cope with the barriers they face to enter the sector (such as the access to land, credit and knowledge). Two percent of the first pillar funding is reserved for installation grants and young farmer payments to achieve just that.

Today's climate and environmental challenges require a transformation in our agricultural system. I am proud to be part of the Commissioners' Group on the European Green Deal to help farmers to play their part in the transition towards a climate-neutral society in 2050 and to develop a vision to get there. A combination of compulsory conditions for all farmers in the Union, with an increased focus on voluntary environmental schemes (such as agro-environment-climate measures or future eco-schemes) will help maintain a common market and create the incentives for change to deliver in this domain.

Furthermore, there is a clear need to simplify the policy and widen the use of new technologies and practices across the farming community. In today's world, we will only be effective if we think and act across the whole value chain under a new 'Farm to Fork' strategy. This must equip the whole food system to meet the sustainability challenges.

I believe that the 2018 Commission proposals provide a strong foundation to modernise and simplify the CAP and increase its environmental and climate ambition. It will be my first priority to work and negotiate with the European Parliament and the Council to reach a political agreement. I am keen to engage in these negotiations to achieve an ambitious outcome in terms of food security and environmental and climate objectives, and helps us achieve the overarching objectives of the European Green Deal, including those stemming from the Commission's 'Farm to Fork' strategy and zero-pollution ambition. I want to incentivise the uptake of digital technologies and ensure the sector can remain competitive, with a fair income for all farmers and increased support for young farmers. In order to do this, we must ensure that we close the digital gap between rural and urban areas and I will intensify the work in this direction.

Strategic Plans

I believe that as Europeans, we share the conviction that a strong and common agricultural policy is necessary to serve common European objectives under clear and common EU rules. I consider that the proposed regulations provide this common framework, and I stand ready to work with the European Parliament to ensure the appropriate safeguards are in place to preserve a level playing field. Within this common framework, the future CAP Strategic Plans will be the right tool to make sure that measures and financing are targeted and effective. At the same time, we must acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable for a Union of 27 and that we need to give more flexibility to Member States to design their interventions according to their needs and specificities.

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.

New Delivery Model

I believe in the capacity of the European Commission and the Member States to put in place a sound system to manage and control the future CAP. Currently, the CAP has a robust structure of governance bodies and control systems, such as Accredited Paying Agencies, Certification Bodies, the Integrated Administration and Control System and the Land Parcel Identification System. Important efforts by all of us have made sure these bodies are currently working well and providing a high level of assurance, as proven by the low error rates of recent years.

Safeguards have been introduced in the proposal in view of ensuring a level playing field in the implementation of the policy, the added value of which is strongly rooted in a common set of specific objectives.

I stand ready to instruct my services to work intensively with Member States to prepare the implementation of the reformed CAP and promise to make sure that the process to approve the future CAP Strategic Plans will be transparent. I will honour the commitment of President-elect, Mrs von der Leyen, to develop a strengthened partnership with the European Parliament and will update you regularly on progress in the implementation of the new policy.

Swiftly achieving an ambitious outcome on the reform of the CAP will be an important step towards the development and implementation of a 'Farm to Fork' strategy. I am keen to work

with the Executive Vice-President and the Commissioners' Group for the European Green Deal, to look at improving the sustainability of the food production process, with a view to developing a long-term future for farmers in Europe.

Long-term vision for rural areas

You have also asked about my long-term vision for rural areas. I firmly believe that it is not possible to have a long-term strategy for agriculture without also ensuring that Europe's rural areas remain vital and dynamic. In this respect, I will continue to defend the key role played by the CAP in the development of rural territories.

Following President-elect von der Leyen's request, I will develop a new long-term vision for rural areas, working closely with the Vice-President-designate for Democracy and Demography and with the Commissioner-designate for Cohesion and Reforms, ensuring that the needs of rural areas are specifically catered for in national Strategic Plans under the new common agricultural policy.

I want to clearly flag to citizens in rural areas that they are not overlooked and to bring back the specific needs of rural areas in the focus of decision makers. The aim is to bring together citizens, stakeholders and policy makers across sectors and governance levels around a common vision for rural areas. This should be done in close consultation with people living in rural areas, as well as local and regional authorities

2. Primary producers of certain agricultural products are concerned that the trade agenda pursued by the current European Commission has led to concessions on market access to the EU for produce which are produced under different standards than in the EU. Despite reassurances, farmers remain concerned that EU agriculture is being sacrificed in order to gain trade concessions for other non-farm/food sectors. How can you ensure that in trade negotiations the concerns of the agricultural community are heeded and the EU's high standards in terms of environmental, social protection, food safety and animal welfare are met by third country imports? What is your position on the possibility to have agricultural products from sensitive sectors excluded in the future trade agreements? As new Commissioner for Agriculture, will you push for strict binding environmental conditions in any new trade agreement? How do you intend to work with the new Commissioner for Trade, and also what is your commitment to appropriately and timely inform the AGRI Committee on international trade related issues?

Benefits of the EU trade policy for the EU agricultural sector

The EU has long been an advocate of the rules based global trading system and a supporter of sustainable trade policies, which I find particularly important. Europe is a highly competitive exporter of the agri-food products worth some 140 billion euros every year. EU agri-food products are known as safe, sustainably produced, nutritious and of high quality. I will make sure this remains our unique selling proposition. With the increasing pressure of climate change, we cannot assume that we will have full food security in the decades to come. Against that background, the European Commission will continue to pursue its trade agenda with the objective of promoting and defending the interests of all EU citizens, including farmers and consumers and integrating climate and sustainability concerns into our trade policy. Harnessing the benefits of trade without leaving our people behind is essential.

The whole EU agri-food sector benefits from the opportunities that international trade brings - through additional market access in third countries and other supporting instruments, such as the protection of European Geographical Indications. As a result, the EU became a net exporter of agri-food nine years ago. This has helped create jobs and opportunities in rural communities all over the EU. We have opened our markets while maintaining our stringent sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards, which are considered a global benchmark.

Overall prospects for agri-food trade are positive: global demand for food is likely to increase due to population and income growth combined with changes in consumer preferences. Europe's farmers and agri-food sector stand to gain from these opportunities, not least because of the excellent reputation for food safety and quality.

Ensuring balanced trade agreements, protecting the EU sensitive sectors

The trade agreements concluded by the EU have been carefully calibrated taking into account the particular situation of sensitive sectors in each agreement. On the other hand, increasing access to the EU market in some of these sectors has been a key demand from trade partners in negotiations.

The Commission's assessment of the market situation and outlook, impact studies including the study on the cumulative impact of trade agreements and extensive consultations with Member States and stakeholders have helped us to carefully calibrate the challenges facing the different agri-food sectors. These consultation and assessment processes have proved efficient and will be continued and further developed. I will analyse all available material and complement as needed with an update of the cumulative impact study, taking into account the results of the most recent negotiations.

In the case of trade agreements with main agricultural actors, the Commission adopted a number of measures that, while offering commercially valuable access to our market, mitigate possible negative effects on sensitive products for the EU. These measures include carefully calibrated tariff rate quotas, in-quota duties and product segmentation, long staging periods and safeguard instruments – in order to ensure a fair and balanced deal with opportunities and benefits on both sides.

Together with my fellow Commissioner for Trade, I intend to continue ensuring that international trade is one of the main drivers for the development of the EU agriculture sector, creating jobs and opportunities for our rural communities without ignoring the particular sensitivities of some EU agricultural sectors. I am also committed to strengthening the EU system of geographical indications to make this policy tool even more beneficial for farmers and rural areas.

Wherever appropriate, sensitive agricultural products should continue receiving a specific treatment in international negotiations so that the sensitivities of the concerned sector are fully reflected in the final deal.

Protecting the EU high standards

As the world's second biggest food importer and biggest exporter, the EU is in a good position to promote high-quality food standards worldwide. The EU is very active in relevant

international fora to increase the level of standards in terms of environmental protection, social protection, food safety and animal welfare which, apply to all producers worldwide.

Our rules and standards are not negotiable. All imports to the EU have to comply with EU rules for human health, food safety, and animal and plant health. EU sanitary and phytosanitary standards apply in the same way to all products in the EU internal market, whether imported or produced domestically. We should also be aware of the need to ensure compliance with our social and environmental standards, which in many cases are higher than in the rest of the world.

EU animal welfare legislation in relation to slaughter applies also to imports. Compliance or equivalency with such legislation is determined following on-the-spot verifications made by the Commission.

In its bilateral trade agreements, the EU is strongly committed to include provisions on standards and compliance, in particular through Trade and Sustainable Development chapters. In our Sustainability Impact Assessments, we carefully examine the social, environmental and economic impacts of trade agreements. President-elect von der Leyen has made it clear that ‘every new trade agreement concluded will have a dedicated chapter on sustainable development’.

Trade agreements, in both the trade and cooperation parts, will provide new platforms for dialogue with third countries on strengthening the protection of the environment and fighting climate change altogether.

Work with the Commissioner-designate for Trade

I am committed to ensuring the respect of our high standards by all products traded in the EU and to making every effort so that our trade partners align their standards with ours. I will work closely with the Commissioner-designate for Trade to make sure that open and fair trade is based on global rules that are effective, enforceable and create a level playing field for all.

One novelty is the appointment by the College of a Chief Trade Enforcement Officer. He/she will work under direct guidance of the Commissioner-designate for Trade to monitor and improve the compliance of our trade agreements, including the dedicated chapter on sustainable development. Thus, we will closely monitor the implementation of climate, environmental and labour protections enshrined in our trade agreements, with a zero-tolerance approach to child labour. In addition, the newly appointed Chief Enforcement Officer will report regularly on the state-of-play and keep the European Parliament and the Council abreast of all developments.

Relations with the European Parliament

I will actively inform the European Parliament and its relevant committees on all agriculture trade-related issues according to the inter-institutional rules. Regular briefings to the European Parliament will be provided at all stages of all international negotiations. With agri-food being an important sector in trade relations and negotiations, I duly commit to contribute to this information and the discussions on international issues with you.

- 3. One of the main objectives for the future Common Agricultural Policy is to further strengthen the contribution of European agriculture as regards the protection of the environment, biodiversity, landscape and the impacts of climate change. What scope do you see for adjustments in the CAP reform in these areas? How do you envisage finding a right balance between environmental concerns and the need for producing food at fair prices? How do you see the agriculture policy developing overall, firstly in terms of the President-elect's "Farm to Fork" strategy for sustainable food and how it can be translated into day-to-day actions for farmers, in the area of climate and how agriculture and forestry can provide carbon sink solutions, considering LULUCF etc.? What is your ambition on pesticide reduction and halting the loss of biodiversity and how will you achieve this? How far can delegating to Member States the full responsibility of defining an ambitious strategy to combat this emergency be the best solution the EU can implement? How can you as Commissioner ensure that Member States will deliver on this?**

When it comes to the environment, my experience is that good farmers do not need to be told how to care for their land or for their animals. That is what they do every day. I fully recognise the serious challenges the EU faces in terms of climate change (both mitigation and adaptation), biodiversity and our natural resources of soil, water and air. Meeting these challenges will bring many tensions and strains at a social and economic level and we must turn them into opportunities. Our farm sector and our rural areas must play their part in this difficult process. In particular, the CAP should help Europe's farmers to improve the sustainability of their production of food and other natural resources. The CAP and the farmers have an important contribution to make to the European Green Deal announced by Commission President-elect von der Leyen. We stand ready to help our farmers improve the levels of care they deliver even further.

The environment and climate in the CAP reform proposal

The proposals for the reform of the CAP are an important step in improving the tools to help farmers make the transition to more sustainable production systems. I promise my full support to the European Parliament and the Council in the negotiations on this reform and I am keen to ensure that the outcome reflects the level of the environment and climate ambition announced by the President-elect.

I therefore fully support the change introduced by the reform in the overall approach to making the CAP greener, while at the same time taking into account social and economic considerations. Rather than laying down rules on farming practices at EU level, the future CAP should focus more on getting value for money. It would balance common elements in EU legislation with flexibility for Member States to use the CAP in ways which work in practice in their particular situations, be it North or South, beef or oranges. This flexibility is extremely important: the needs of, for example, a certain extensively farmed area in one country may be very different from those of a zone of intensively farmed land in another. The proposed common objectives and rules, and in particular the common system for measuring results, will allow monitoring and ensuring that all Member States play their part in delivering on our sustainability commitments.

Another key element of the proposal concerns links to EU legislation on the environment and climate. I believe the CAP must help farmers meet often challenging environmental objectives. Every Member State will be encouraged to include in the CAP Strategic Plan how it plans to use the agricultural policy instruments to help meet the ambitious European targets

arising from EU legislation on climate change, energy, water, air quality, biodiversity and pesticides. For example, all Member States have to cut their greenhouse gas emissions under the terms of the Effort-Sharing Regulation, which covers part of emissions from agriculture. Each Member State's CAP plan will have to show what contribution the CAP would make to achieving that target.

Then there are the elements in the CAP reform proposal concerning basic standards to be met by farmers – mainly within the system of enhanced 'conditionality'. Several new and improved standards target the environment and climate. One of these is the protection of wetlands and peatlands, which are important stores of carbon. Another is the use of a Farm Sustainability Tool for Nutrients, to help improve nutrient management. In addition, certain obligations from the Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides would also become part of the conditionality system. This is one of several ways in which the CAP would make the farm sector to improve performance over pesticide use. Innovation, research and knowledge transfer are essential to help farmers in this transition. The new Horizon 2020 mission dedicated to soils presents a novel approach to ensure innovation links with farmer needs.

Just as important as the system of basic standards within the future CAP are the proposed funding tools. It is essential to incentivise farmers to adopt sustainable practices and the proposed new tool – eco-schemes – would do just that. It would enable a considerable share of funding from the first pillar of the CAP to be spent on care for the environment and climate, which adds on the existing rural development support.

I have always been a firm supporter of rural development policy and will make sure to sustain familiar and valuable agri-environment-climate payments, as well as support for eco-friendly investments (including afforestation). Training, innovation and co-operation will also be fostered, as these are key to ensuring the dissemination of innovative practices which can reconcile the needs for food at fair price and environmental and climate concerns.

I emphasise that, overall, each Member State would need to show greater ambition as regards the environment and climate, through its use of the CAP, than in the current period and I count on the support of the European Parliament to make sure this will be possible under the agreed legislation.

I am keen to find a political agreement on reform of the CAP that offers scope to support targeted action in practice to address climate change and other environmental challenges on farms. Let me be specific. I want to make sure farmers can receive support to apply better crop rotations and appropriate tillage management, to bind more carbon into the soil – increasing the carbon stock capacity of arable land. They might become involved in a CAP Pillar I eco-scheme to leave an extra portion of their land out of production, turning it into a haven for biodiversity. In addition, farmers might receive compensation through CAP Pillar II for cutting their use of pesticides. Agriculture is the only sector with rising air pollutants' emissions and the only source of air pollution currently not directly regulated. We should support farmers in curbing these emissions. They might use support for investments to make their storage or irrigation systems more efficient or to switch to precision farming; or they might 'go organic'. I want to make sure that the high ambition of the European Green Deal is translated into corresponding support for European farms, to help farming families prepare for a sustainable future.

The Commission's CAP reform proposals delegate to Member States the responsibility of defining a strategy to meet the challenge of climate change – or any other challenge in order

to target their use of the CAP to their particular situations. However, they would nonetheless be steered by common objectives, common basic standards, common types of funded action and common indicators. Furthermore, when assessing each CAP strategic plan, the Commission would approve it only if it is fit for meeting the objectives and challenges. Finally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of CAP strategic plans would help to identify any problems during the implementation period.

The broader picture: the ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy

I believe we must preserve the vital work our farmers do to provide Europeans with high-quality, nutritious, affordable and safe food. I equally believe that ensuring food security has to be done in full consideration of the limited resources we have and the need to preserve and improve their state. Soils of good quality, healthy biodiversity and pollinators, and an appropriate climate are all crucial elements in production and farmers know that. Expectations of society also have to be fully considered, be it regarding the need to have food that is nutritious, but also safe and affordable. I fully understand that to achieve the new ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy for a more sustainable food system, we need the support of all farmers, stakeholders and consumers.

In addition to reflections on the current legal system for the authorisation, marketing and use of pesticides, under the responsibility of my colleague in charge of health, the reformed CAP will play an important role to ‘aim higher’ and mobilise farmers and stakeholders to use pesticides in the most sustainable manner. Farmers might need to continue to use pesticides, but we need to guide them towards less dependency and workable alternatives towards better but also more sustainable crop protection by e.g. privileging resistant varieties, low-risk pesticides or mechanical tools and alternative practices. The CAP can be an effective tool to drive that change as part of a ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy that forms part of the step-change ambition embodied by the European Green Deal.

For food systems to be ‘sustainable’, they should work in line with and in support of our determination to combat climate change and protect our natural resources and biodiversity. They should however also offer adequate financial returns to farmers and other economic operators. I want food systems to be an engine of success powered by high standards, new products and practices, smart and efficient processes, and a general responsiveness to individual and societal needs.

The CAP certainly has an essential role to play here – with its tools that address not only farmers but also other operators in the food supply chain. I am committed to working with the Executive Vice-President-designate for the European Green Deal – and of course with you – to ensure agriculture plays its part in the transformation of Europe’s ecological transition.

- 4. Regarding the CAP budget, and the challenges facing agriculture and rural areas, do you agree that the budget should be maintained at current levels and which steps will you take to defend the interest of farmers and rural communities? How will you approach that question, and what is your position on the particularly severe cuts envisaged especially for rural development? Given the developments during the last couple of years regarding trade wars, climate change and Brexit, what should in your opinion be the share of the Common Agricultural Policy in the next MFF 2021-2027? How will you ensure a fair distribution of CAP payments among farmers?**

Maintaining CAP funding at current levels

An important part of the trust that our citizens place in us is that we use their money efficiently and effectively. That means we must not make promises that we cannot keep. The EU budget is an essential tool to implement the Union's priorities and ambitions. It will be important to ensure that the initiatives set out in the political guidelines of the President-elect can be fully accommodated within the next financial framework.

The Commission proposal of May 2018 on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 needs to be seen in a broad context. We need a modern and ambitious EU budget that is able to address both traditional challenges and new priorities. Moreover, with Brexit, the loss of an important net payer to the EU budget had to be taken into account. Overall, I believe the proposal is a reasonable and balanced approach.

In this challenging context, the Commission has proposed for the CAP a total of EUR 365 billion (current prices), corresponding to 28.5% of the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. The proposed funding shows the continued importance of agriculture in the EU – also in the period post 2020.

As to rural development, the reduction in EU funding must be seen together with the proposal to increase national co-financing. It is a question of rebalancing support between EU and Member State budgets, with the aim to keep an adequate level of public support for rural areas. This also means that the more modest changes proposed in the funding of the first pillar of the common agricultural policy ensure that direct payments will continue playing their pivotal role to support farmers' income.

Moreover, the proposal maintains the flexibility for Member States to shift funds between direct payments and rural development, with further possibilities when it comes to targeting environmental or climate objectives.

It is essential to continue the negotiations with speed and determination to avoid damaging delays in the launch of the new programmes. I will in that context make a strong case that the impact of a significantly smaller budget would be keenly felt across Europe and impair the Union's capacity to deliver efficiently.

Fair distribution

Although the role of direct payments is generally welcome, the support sometimes prompts accusations of unfairness. These numbers reflect a system where most payments are area-based and land is concentrated among a relatively small number of farmers. But we should not forget that half of CAP beneficiaries are very small farms with less than 5 hectares, and 77% of the direct payments go to small and professional family farms of less than 250 hectares.

However, I believe we must promote an even more balanced distribution of support, as reflected in the recent CAP reform proposals, which provide for a series of instruments Member States must or can use to improve the fairness of the distribution of direct payments and better target them to family farmers who need it most:

- The establishment of a minimum number of hectares farmers should have to access direct support (i.e. minimum requirements) to ensure support is targeted to viable farms.
- The complementary redistributive income support for sustainability, which is proposed as a mandatory tool for Member States, will be tailor-made by them according to their specificities.
- The reduction of payments and capping could also contribute to the re-distribution of area-based direct payments if the product is used to finance the support for smaller farms.
- The basic income support could be differentiated according to groups of territories with different needs.
- Also, Member States keeping payment entitlements for granting this basic support will have to:
 - set a maximum value to the entitlements
 - ensure a minimum level of convergence of the value of all entitlements by 2026 at the latest (i.e. internal convergence process)
- Member States can also opt for granting a round-sum to smaller farmers in need of higher support level.

Putting all these elements together, I believe they address adequately the issue of fairness of the distribution of direct payments among European farmers.

5. The Commission came forward with a number of initiatives to rebalance power within the food supply chain, including the Directive to tackle unfair trading practices in the agricultural and food supply chain. Can you outline how you intend to continue this important work during the next mandate and what areas you will focus on? What, in your view, is the effect of EU competition policy on primary producers and their ability to collectively negotiate on price? In order to face challenges such as food security and global competitiveness of EU farmers worldwide, how do you intend to promote knowledge, development and uptake of new technologies and innovations in European agriculture?

I have long been concerned by the relatively weak position of our farmers in the food supply chain. The objective of a fair standard of living for farmers is embedded in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. To that end, we need a viable farming sector, which is able to provide European citizens with nutritious, affordable and safe food and European farmers with a realistic level of income. The structure and organisation of the supply chain, the relation between buyers and sellers, has to ensure farmers can make a fair income. In recent years, the Commission has taken important steps to rebalance the power relationship in the food supply chain. I am committed to this cause and will ensure the implementation and enforcement of these steps.

Producer cooperation

In 2018, new rules on producer cooperation for all agricultural sectors were introduced by the co-legislator through the so-called Omnibus Regulation. Farmers can for example sell products via recognised producer organisations and have legal certainty that they do not fall foul of competition rules. Increased numbers of producer organisations will help farmers achieve economies of scale and provide them with a better negotiation position when dealing with the downstream sectors.

In some parts of the EU, farmers are at times hesitant to cooperate. This is a historical legacy. I will thus lay emphasis on explaining to producers the advantages of cooperation and raising awareness of the possibilities and incentives the EU legal framework provides. The CAP reform proposal broadens the scope of such measures for all agricultural sectors; Member States will be able to decide in their strategic plans whether to transfer a part of the direct payments envelope to such sectoral programmes.

Unfair trading practices

Farmers do not deserve to suffer unfair treatment from their trading partners. Until May 2021 my priority will be to ensure the smooth transposition into national law of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive that was adopted in April 2019. The adoption of this Directive has been a major success of the outgoing legislature. A lot of the credit for this has to be handed to the honourable Members of the European Parliament, who insisted that the problem needed to be tackled at the EU level and supported the basic principles of the Commission proposal. I will make sure that the national enforcement authorities will have possibilities to share their experience concerning enforcement, develop best practices and inform each other about new developments. The Commission will play an active role in facilitating this dialogue. In short, we will ensure that the Directive is a success and another piece in the jigsaw that ensures the future of farms in the Union.

During the legislative process for the UTP Directive, the European Parliament called on the Commission to launch an in-depth analysis on the extent and effects of the buying alliances of retailers on the economic functioning of the agricultural and food supply chain. The Commission will organise an expert workshop on retail alliances in Brussels in November 2019 to gather the relevant facts. A clear diagnosis of the situation will help us establish what further steps might be necessary.

Market transparency

Another important area is market transparency. A recent legislative initiative will help close the information gap in particular for smaller and medium sized operators in the food chain by publishing representative data such as selling and purchase prices for key agricultural products. In the coming months, the Commission will actively help Member States to develop the necessary reporting methods to implement the new rules. Again, increasing market transparency has been a demand from the Parliament and I will make sure the system set up is an effective one.

Producer cooperation and competition law

Article 42 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that the competition rules apply to the agricultural sector only to the extent decided by the European Parliament and the Council, which reflects the specificities of the sector and the primacy of the objectives of the CAP, in particular a fair standard of living for farmers. No other sector benefits from such a carve-out from competition rules, acknowledging the specificities of the position of farmers in the food chain and the strategic importance of food security.

These rules allow our farmers to organize and act collectively and thus to better see eye to eye with their partners downstream in the food supply chain. I fully stand behind these provisions and intend to closely follow their implementation. Implementation and consolidation is very important.

A particular arrangement I want to highlight are the collective agreements among farmers as they create opportunities to contribute to the new Green Deal through their provision of eco-services. I will be in close touch with my fellow Commissioners, notably the Executive Vice-President-designate responsible for a Europe fit for the Digital Age, to ensure that we explore the existing potential.

Innovation

New technologies have a great potential to address the sustainability challenges. They contribute to increasing economic competitiveness of farms while at the same time improving environmental sustainability.

Having said that, it should be stressed that innovation is not only coming from new technology. Innovation can also take the form of new or revived practices, and traditional knowledge can also be source of new ideas and reinvented solutions to current challenges. Innovation is a process requiring a combination of different steps. We need to make sure that all farmers have access to the right knowledge. This can be done by involving them more closely in the innovation process so that the solutions developed address their real needs or by developing specific training and education programmes to improve their skills.

In the case of new technologies, the availability of adequate infrastructures to deploy them is also key: we need to ensure better connectivity of rural areas through the roll out of fast internet.

To enhance the innovation process, the Commission has proposed to invest heavily in agricultural research and innovation. EUR 10 billion is proposed for research on food and agriculture under Horizon Europe. We have to make sure that we make best use of these funds for the benefit of EU agriculture.

Knowledge, innovation and digitisation is a cross-cutting objective under the new CAP. The CAP will thus provide increasing opportunities for innovation projects (operational groups). There is also more emphasis on farm advice and farmers learning from each other.

Innovation actions under the Research policy and the CAP will be streamlined under the umbrella of the European Innovation Partnership, which aims to create a bridge between

science and practice. This will speed up the dissemination and implementation of innovative practices on the ground.