



## Opening Address by President von der Leyen at the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture

Brussels, 25 January 2024

It is my very great pleasure to welcome you today to the formal launch of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture.

I put forward this idea in my State of the Union last summer. I think we all sense that there is an increasing division and polarisation when it comes to topics related to agriculture. I am deeply convinced that we can only overcome this polarisation that we all sense by dialogue. We have discussed this yesterday evening.

This is the reason why we want to bring together, around this table, a pretty diverse group of actors of Europe's agri-food sector. I am very glad to see you all here. I am glad to see representatives from our farmers, farm workers and rural communities, who are the custodians of our best traditions and who bring life to our countryside. We also have the industries around the table, you who put food on the table. We have members of consumers and environmental groups, because all of society cares about the countryside and our food, but also the financial sector and academia are here in this room. So indeed, a very diverse group, but all stakeholders in the same field. And I am sure that in the coming days and weeks, we will have many more stakeholders who will send us their thoughts, ideas and proposals. They will share their ideas with us. And we want to listen and ask you to discuss and develop scenarios for the future. Basically, it is about describing the way forward. I want first and foremost to thank all of you that you are dedicating your really precious time with us and that you are also sharing your expertise and knowledge and, hopefully, your ideas for the future with us.

Yesterday evening, I very much liked our start at the informal dinner. And what I took away from the informal dinner yesterday evening is that we all have the same sense of urgency – that things have to improve – and that we have to find a new way forward, common and lasting solutions to the problems that you are all very much aware of. You will discuss under the leadership of Professor Strohschneider.

Professor Strohschneider, let me once again thank you very much for having accepted this challenge. This is wonderful, and I am very grateful for that.

Your task is of crucial importance. It is thanks to European agriculture – the women and men who work the land – that Europe has the healthiest and highest-quality food in the world. Our farmers operate on a daily basis in a very competitive global market. You are often the most vulnerable part in the value chain. And you of course deserve a fair remuneration. Our aim is to support your livelihoods and guarantee European food security. Each of you have a role to play, each of you from your own perspective, of course. Consumers will have a role to play, as their choices drive innovation and demand. Parents, for example, are looking for healthy food for their children. They choose very carefully. Young people increasingly ask for more sustainable food. Food retailers and processors are equally crucial. You have to compete globally and you have to act locally. You are responding to consumer preferences. Many of you stand up for animal welfare and biodiversity. And many of you defend the interests of the less well-off, for example by fighting food waste. I listened very carefully to you yesterday.

It is also thanks to all of you, and each and everyone, that we did overcome already very difficult times. If we think back to the pandemic, or the energy crisis or the food crisis both triggered by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. We have also suffered from high inflation, both agricultural inputs and food were affected by that. So we had already difficult times to overcome together. And it is amazing to see that Europe's agri-food sector showed a remarkable resilience in all of this.

In addition, we are all making tremendous efforts to contribute to our collective goals of the European Green Deal. It is existential. Because we all live with nature and from nature. And while we certainly may not always see eye to eye on all issues, we all agree that the challenges are without any question mounting – be it competition from abroad, be it overregulation at home, be it climate change or the loss of biodiversity or be it demographic decline. Just to name a few of the challenges

we have also been discussing yesterday. What agri-food in Europe needs, is a long-term perspective to face these challenges, a predictable way forward. And to forge this way forward, that is your task. The task of the 27 individuals that are here in this room.

I hope that you will build the trust to appreciate each other's perspectives and to find common solutions for the future of agriculture in Europe. This dialogue aims to find a new consensus on issues with which we all struggle: For example, how can we elevate the standard of living for farmers and the attractiveness of rural communities? How can agriculture be sustainable within planetary boundaries? How can we better harness knowledge and technology? How can we enhance Europe's food system for a competitive, thriving future? These are just some of the questions that we are facing. Finding a consensus and a common view on the way forward is certainly not an easy task. I am fully aware of that. But I also think it is an immense opportunity that we have here. An opportunity to shape the future and an essential part of the economy of tomorrow. It is an opportunity to preserve an essential part of our European soul, our way of life. Because we all depend on our countryside. We all live with nature and in nature.

Today, I want to assure you that the vision, or perhaps the advice or the concrete recommendations that you agree on by summer, will impact the work for the coming years. I trust you, I rely on your expertise and your knowledge, your ideas. I am very much looking forward to working with you and I am wishing all of us, 'bon courage', good luck and a lot of trust in the coming weeks and months for this important work.

Thank you very much.

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Press contacts:

[Eric MAMER](#) (+32 2 299 40 73)

[Arianna PODESTA](#) (+32 2 298 70 24)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

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