

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Christophe HANSEN****Agriculture and Food****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? How will you contribute to implementing the political guidelines of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? How will you implement youth mainstreaming?

What guarantees of independence are you able to give 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?

For over five years I have been a Member of the European Parliament, serving in different roles and in various committees. In 2022 I was elected Quaestor of the European Parliament. In this capacity I dedicated my efforts to strengthening the institution by improving the conditions that allow its Members to fulfil their mandates. My track-record as rapporteur is one of building bridges across Political Groups. This is evidenced by gaining very large majorities in plenary on files such as the Foreign Subsidies Regulation, the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement or the Drinking Water Directive. If I am confirmed by the Parliament to continue serving the European project as Commissioner, this first-hand experience of the value of inclusive listening and compromise, will be invaluable.

Growing up and contributing to the functioning of a small family farm on the border between Luxembourg and Belgium, I experienced the positive impact of the Union early on. This lived experience, fortified with a degree in environmental sciences and risk management, has instilled in me a genuine respect for our environment, a strong conviction of the need to create sustainable livelihoods for those dedicated to the land and our food, and an acute awareness of the key role EU agricultural and environmental policies play. I am therefore particularly pleased that the President-elect has entrusted me with the Agriculture and Food portfolio. My professional career and public service focused on matters relating to nature and farming, most recently as chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity and member of the Committee for Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development in the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies. From these experiences, I learnt that the vocation of farming is failing to entice young people.

I welcome that the President-elect has made it my priority to strengthen the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the agricultural and food sector. For farming to meet future challenges it needs future generations to undertake the custodianship of the land by providing them with fulfilment and dignity. I fully share her views that this needs to be done by actively listening to the concerns of people in rural communities, more than 30% of the EU's population. I will ensure a follow-up on the report from the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture, which has been prominently listed among four reports that will serve as a basis for the work of the College. I commit to work with stakeholders and Member States so that the relevant tools of the CAP to improve the participation of women in farming and their situation in rural areas are deployed to their full potential and complement effectively national interventions. I will work on this basis to ensure that the future CAP is fit for purpose. For example, by easing access for women farmers to loans or additional investments for their farms. Moreover, I will ensure that my cabinet respects gender balance.

Generational renewal and the support for young farmers are issues very close to my heart. Ensuring that farming will be a viable and attractive activity decades from now, will be the central tenet of my approach to agricultural policy. Securing the future of farming in Europe means ensuring sustainability in all aspects, from soil health to water resilience and climate risk preparedness, from promoting thriving rural areas and fostering investment and innovation, including access to capital, to ensuring the profitability of the farming profession and strengthening the position of farmers in the food value chain. Beyond presenting the strategy for generational renewal, I will pay close attention to the needs and concerns of young people when implementing the current CAP, building upon the annual Youth Policy Dialogues, with the first Dialogue to be organised already in the first 100 days of the mandate of the new College.

Throughout my career and in my public service I have observed the independence and accountability rules. I will continue to fully respect the letter and the spirit of the Treaties, including on the obligation to act in the European interest without taking any instructions and in particular as regards the obligations of full independence, transparency, impartiality and availability to the Commission. I will fully respect and honour the Code of Conduct of the members of the European Commission. I commit to immediately inform the President of any situation which might give rise to a conflict of interests in the performance of my official duties, and should any change be required I will update my declaration of interests, which will be made accessible to the public.

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

Can you commit to duly informing Parliament about your actions and those of your departments? In what respect do you consider yourself accountable to Parliament?

What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of your engagement with and presence in Parliament, both in committee and in plenary, transparency, 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 timely information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

I am fully committed to keeping the Parliament informed of my actions and of those of the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. My experience as a Member of the European Parliament and of the Luxembourgish Chamber of Deputies means that accountability to Parliament, political control and democratic oversight of the executive, became second nature to me. I will take full political responsibility for my actions in the area of Agriculture and Food before the European Parliament and the European citizens it represents. My role as a Member of the College, if I am confirmed, inherently comes with a duty to work with my fellow Commissioners in a spirit of collegiality and loyalty, in accordance with the working methods established by the President. Agriculture and food are intrinsically linked with other policies, which makes this cooperation all the more important. Having been a Member of the European Parliament for more than five years, I fully share the Parliament's legitimate expectations from Commissioners. Dialogue and regular, open exchanges with the committees and the plenary are the bedrock of our democratic engagement. It will always be a privilege for me to return to the Parliament, to respond to Members' questions and to maintain a high level of mutual trust, openness and transparency in our cooperation. The President-elect stressed in her Political Guidelines her determination to strengthen the dialogue with the Parliament. I fully subscribe to this in recognition of the importance of cooperating with the Parliament and its elected Members for the efficacy and legitimacy of the EU political process. For this reason, I commit to regularly attend the Parliament Plenaries and to work closely with the committees with a stake in agriculture and food matters, with their members, coordinators and chairs. As a Member of the Parliament, I had a nearly perfect attendance record for plenary sittings; if confirmed as a Member of the College, I will continue to hold myself to this very high standard. I will ensure that the same openness, transparency, and cooperation guides the work of my Cabinet and the Commission services under my responsibility.

I will provide an effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives. I take the responsibility to implement the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making for my areas of responsibility. I will take the views of the Parliament into account, and I will do my utmost to ensure that Parliament's resolutions get a timely written response. I note that the President-elect in her political guidelines expressed her commitment to deepen cooperation on Article 225 TFEU by asking Commissioners to take part in structured dialogues with Parliamentary committees on these resolutions. I will be pleased to do so, and you can expect to see me often in Brussels and in Strasbourg.

Finally, I had the honour to participate in several legislative procedures, from drafting and negotiating Parliament's internal position, to delivering on the mandate in interinstitutional negotiations. This experience has left me with a deep-set conviction of the necessity of equal treatment of the Parliament and the Council and the need for a special partnership between Parliament and Commission. As such I commit to fully implement the provisions of the aforementioned Agreements, ensuring equal treatment whenever the competences between Parliament and Council are equal. I consider this to be a prerequisite to allow the three institutions to successfully negotiate and reach political agreements that deliver on European citizens' expectations in the next five years.

Questions from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

3. The farmers' protests in the spring were a clear expression of the enormous difficulties faced by farmers. They particularly highlighted the need for a fair income, low profitability of farming due to low producer prices and high input costs, unfair competition from imports from third countries and lack of reciprocity, and the regulatory burden and lack of incentives to meet high environmental standards in agriculture. As farmers are often the weakest link in the food supply chain and their income is structurally below the average of other sectors, what are your ideas for a "Vision on Agriculture and Food" as announced in your mission letter as Commissioner-designate to ensure a fair income for farmers, improve their position in the food supply chain, enhance transparency in price formation, as well as attract young farmers to the sector? How do you plan, in the short and long term, to further alleviate and streamline administrative burden and reporting obligations arising from various policies on farmers?

Farmers and those who contemplate taking up farming deserve a clear vision for agriculture and food systems that brings more predictability and is fit for future generations. At this inflection point, we must ask ourselves: what are the conditions that will allow farmers to continue to undertake the custodianship of the land, providing them with fulfilment and dignity, to live off their farms today, tomorrow and in 2040?

Many farmers have had tough times, and they made their voices heard this year. Low and fluctuating income, unbalanced commercial relations in the value chain, cumulative regulatory requirements, the effects of climate change and growing geopolitical instability are challenges making farming often unrewarding. It is therefore not surprising that farming is failing to entice young people.

I want to salute the remarkable resilience farmers have demonstrated over the past years. They have managed to continue providing sufficient, safe and high-quality food for Europe and third countries, all the while being custodians of the land, preserving our landscapes, keeping our cultural heritage alive and our rural areas vibrant. If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will prepare a Vision for Agriculture and Food in the first 100 days of my mandate, working under the guidance of the President and in cooperation with other members of the College. It will be a roadmap for future initiatives that will cover a broad set of strategic issues for agriculture and food.

This Vision will look at the entire agri-food value chain and propose pathways to ensure long-term competitiveness, sustainability, profitability and attractiveness of the sector, maintaining the diversity of farming across our continent. It will address, among others, the socio-economic situation of farmers and in particular their income, making value chains fairer, enhancing the resilience of farms, incentivising sustainable farming practices, reducing food losses and waste, managing and reducing administrative burden stemming from national and European legislation and reporting requirements and stimulating knowledge, innovation and investment.

The Vision will spell out how we will advance in these key areas, working together with stakeholders, Member States, and the European Parliament. It will draw on the report of the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU Agriculture and consider all relevant perspectives, including notably from the European Parliament and the Council.

Creating the conditions to turn the trend of lagging generational renewal, by making sure that farming remains a viable and attractive vocation decades from now, will be the central tenet of my Vision. The most recent figures show that only 12% of all farm holdings in the EU are managed by farmers under the age of 40. We need bold action to sustain the future of farming for generations to come. We must ensure that the next generation can continue to find fulfilment in their farming activity providing high-quality food, with production systems where nature and agriculture go hand in hand. A young farmer needs a fair income, fertile soils, access to land and capital, the right skills, technology and innovative breeding material, with resilient crop and livestock production systems that also meet consumer demands, and producing sustainably in attractive rural areas.

That is why I will closely engage with young farmers and European youth, including through a Youth Policy Dialogue in the first 100 days of the new mandate, to develop a strategy for generational renewal. This strategy will aim to enable young farmers to fully dedicate their entrepreneurial spirit and innovation potential to the future of the sector. It will include concrete and innovative measures to better address key barriers for generational renewal, including access to land, credit, and knowledge. One of these will be a European land observatory that would help us promote transparency in the land market, including through a mechanism to screen the origin of investment into land and farms.

For farmers to stay in this profession and young and new ones to enter, fair and sufficient farm income is a crucial condition. At the moment, however, farmers' incomes are on average much lower than average wages in the EU. Many farmers lack the necessary means to invest in the transition. This lopsided situation must change. Farmers must get a better revenue from the market, allowing them also to make the necessary investments to future proof and render their farms more resilient.

To achieve this, if confirmed as Commissioner, I will defend a comprehensive set of measures. We must draw on all sources of income: income from the market, public income support, and new, alternative income sources, such as carbon farming. The ultimate aim of our policy must be to ensure that the market rewards farmers more appropriately while protecting our soils and environment to ensure that the basis for agriculture will be sustained for the generations to come. Evidently, support through the CAP remains essential to support farmers, reward them for ecosystem services and compensate for work in areas with natural constraints, as well as to support investments into climate mitigation, adaptation and compliance with environmental obligations. Regarding the Common Agricultural Policy, we must make it simpler and more targeted and find the right balance between incentives, investments and regulation. I will ensure that it delivers socio-economic support to those farmers who need it most, notably small-scale farmers, provides incentives for ecosystem services and supports our rural areas.

For farmers to get decent revenue from the market, they need to be able to negotiate fair prices. At the moment, however, many farmers are not in a position to do this because of their weaker negotiating power and lack of market transparency. I am committed to further strengthening farmers' bargaining power and minimising the risk of them being systematically forced to sell below production costs.

If confirmed as Commissioner, I will outline pathways on how this can be done in the Vision for agriculture and food. Firstly, we need to help farmers make better use of existing tools, notably the possibility to join producer organisations and their associations. Secondly, I will recommend that the Commission rapidly proposes targeted amendments to the Common Market Organisation Regulation to strengthen the producers' position in the negotiation and conclusion of contracts for the supply of agricultural products, foster cooperation and improve price transmission. Similarly, to further protect farmers against unfair trading practices, I will recommend that the Commission proposes new rules on cross-border enforcement in the framework of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive. Based on the results of the ongoing evaluation of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive, I will, in close exchange with all stakeholders, consider a review of the current rules. Moreover, I intend to strengthen trust among value chain operators by enhancing transparency in price formation and transmission, using the insights of the new Agrifood chain Observatory.

Lastly, I will make simplification and efficient implementation a priority. Simpler policies and access to the appropriate tools are a necessity for a more competitive agriculture. At the same time, meaningful reporting and controls are needed to properly track achievement of our policy objectives, including our environmental goals. My vision for the future will therefore strike a balance: allowing farmers to work their land without excessive bureaucracy while providing the right level of assurance on how EU money is spent, based on right targeting and performance. We must use the benefits of digital technology and tools to this end, while reducing the burden for smaller beneficiaries through simple schemes and closing the digital gap between younger and older farmers.

The Commission is currently thoroughly analysing the administrative burden for farmers and national authorities; there is still much room for improvement and I commit to going further, based on the results of the ongoing analysis. I intend to work closely with my colleagues in the College, as well as with stakeholders, Member States and the European Parliament, to further reduce administrative burdens on farmers across all European legislation affecting the agricultural sector. Moreover, reducing the burden for farmers and streamlining the CAP will be a priority for the proposals of the CAP after 2027.

4. Mr. Commissioner-designate, what are your views on the implications of enlargement with regard to the future CAP especially the future of direct payments? How do you intend to avoid or mitigate the possible adverse effects of the enlargement process on EU agricultural markets and producers? Do you currently see the need to further regulate the entry of Ukrainian products in order to avoid destabilising EU agricultural markets? Do you consider the protective measures in force since last June to be sufficient? More broadly, what are your views on the current renegotiation of the free trade agreement with Ukraine?

The EU's enlargement policy is more than ever a geostrategic investment in long-term peace, stability, influence, competitiveness and security, including security of our agri-food sector, for our continent. We need to both support the candidates and potential candidates along their respective EU paths and prepare ourselves to welcome new members in the Union.

The enlargement to the candidate countries could strengthen the EU as a geostrategic actor in the agricultural sector, enhance our role in supporting global food security, and significantly increase the EU strategic autonomy in food, feed, biomass and soil, at a time of increasing risks due to climate change. This will also entail challenges. But this is not the first EU enlargement and not the first time we need to reflect on the future of the CAP in an enlarged Union. This was previously achieved by adjusting EU policies ahead of accession, notably by a rigorous accession process ensuring enlargement countries are fully prepared in advance of accession, and through targeted assistance. This approach has contributed to closing the gaps between old and new Member States. Formal EU accession did not come as a disruptive shock to new and existing Member States, but as a further stage in a smooth integration of new Member States into the EU's policies and budget. This was complemented, where needed, by transitional periods after accession, such as the phasing-in of funds and access to the EU labour market, as well as gradual integration into the internal market.

I will closely work together with the Commissioner for Enlargement, Member States, enlargement countries and stakeholders to discuss the future of agriculture in a larger Union. The potential impact of enlargement on agriculture in current Member States needs to be assessed, taking into consideration several uncertainties:

- the farm structures and production capacity of the enlargement countries by the time of their accession;
- the future support that enlargement countries may receive to support the adaptation of their agricultural sector (e.g. Pre-Accession Assistance programmes);
- the continuing evolution of agricultural sectors, which are not at all static, and of the consumption patterns in the EU, the enlargement countries and globally.

We must remember that accession is and will remain a merit-based process, fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each partner, starting with the fundamental criteria for EU accession, notably democracy, the rule of law, economic and public administration reforms.

Hence, with or without enlargement, we must make our Common Agricultural Policy simpler and more targeted; and find the right balance between incentives, investments and regulation. The specific needs of a larger Union come in addition to the inevitable need for a modernised, simpler Common Agricultural Policy. Enlargement is thus the opportunity – though not the trigger –, to make sure that our spending is better aligned with our policy objectives of today and tomorrow.

I am confident that, like in the past, we will be able to adjust and prepare the CAP to the realities of a larger Union, ensuring it remains effective and benefits current and future farmers in all regions of an enlarged EU.

With respect to trade relations with Ukraine, let me first reiterate that I stand by Ukraine and President von der Leyen's full commitment to continuing our unwavering support to Ukraine in light of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. To support the Ukrainian economy, immediate measures were taken in the form of EU autonomous trade measures (ATM) that granted Ukraine full trade liberalisation as of June 2022. In view of potential pressure in the markets of neighbouring countries: the current ATM Regulation includes mechanisms to address serious concerns for EU producers in the form of strengthened safeguard provisions. This has helped the most sensitive markets to stabilise and gave positive signals with respect to the longer-term perspective.

Going forward, I acknowledge the need for a more stable and structural arrangement with Ukraine on our mutual trade in agri-food products. The Commission already committed to initiate talks with Ukraine for permanent and reciprocal further trade liberalisation, as provided for by the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The review of

the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) will also contribute to Ukraine's gradual integration into the Single Market, benefitting citizens and businesses from both the EU and Ukraine. It will take into account the lessons learned from the current liberalisation and provide economic certainty and stability in the EU-Ukraine trade relations for the coming years. The objective is to give Ukrainian operators continued opportunities for exporting agri-food products to the EU, while at the same time responding to the concerns of EU stakeholders, particularly on specific sectors where increased imports from Ukraine may adversely affect the situation on the markets. Likewise, EU operators will have better access to the Ukrainian market. I will pay attention to the interests of EU farmers and ensure that the treatment of sensitive sectors under this process finds the right balance. Furthermore, as regards this permanent and reciprocal market opening, it is the Commission's intention to link improved access to the European market for Ukrainian agricultural products to Ukraine's gradual compliance with relevant EU production standards.

5. Agriculture is more dependent than almost any other sector on external factors such as climate events, volatile markets or geopolitical circumstances over which it has little or no influence. A resilient agricultural sector and robust crisis management are therefore essential for future agricultural policy. As Commissioner-designate, what are your ideas for improving the resilience and crisis and risk management of the agricultural sector, including the crisis reserve, in light of the above-mentioned external challenges? In particular, how do you plan to deal with water-related challenges, including water availability that are increasingly becoming key issues in agricultural production?

Climate change and extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and pollution, as well as the loss of agricultural, forest and other semi-natural and natural land confront Europe with increasing risks and vulnerabilities. As highlighted in the European Climate Risk Assessment of March this year, crop production is already facing critical risk levels in southern Europe. In addition, geopolitical and related economic developments are increasingly exerting pressure on agriculture and food systems. We can all agree that these present massive challenges for the EU agri-food sector in a very competitive domestic and global context. At the same time the EU agri-food sector has many strengths, not least the European farmers and the diversity of the EU territory.

The EU agriculture and food sector is already engaged in a transition: to become more resilient and sustainable, to mitigate and adapt further to climate change, to reduce its impact on the environment – while continuing to contribute to the EU and global food security. This is thanks to innovative and skilled farmers and entrepreneurs in the sector. We should recognise this.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will ensure that we step up our efforts to accompany farmers and businesses in this transition and create an enabling environment to let each farmer and entrepreneur in the EU find a business model that fits best their geographic and climatic reality. As outlined by the Strategic Dialogue, bolstering the transformative resilience of the agri-food sector must combine both short-term and long-term solutions.

I will defend an EU income policy for Europe's farmers.

To prepare for the future, we need to better address climate risk preparedness and crisis management, ensuring that the needs of rural areas are specifically catered for. An efficient and effective policy approach to risk management in agriculture must consider interactions and trade-offs between different risks, on-farm strategies, market and supply chain solutions, and government policies. While crisis management tools are needed to deal with catastrophic events in the short term, they should not limit transformational change and farmers' uptake of longer-term solutions. It is important that risk and crisis management policies are enablers of a transformation towards a resilient and sustainable agricultural sector.

With costs related to the exceptional events making agricultural insurances increasingly risky for operators, novel approaches are necessary. To be clear: existing insurance schemes will become less financially viable both for operators and for the insured. To counter this negative spiral, we need to share risks better, de-risk insurance to attract more private funding and provide for an enabling environment by working on market transparency for instance. I commit to work on an improved offer of agricultural risk management tools in all EU Member States.

I will also review the existing toolbox of instruments under the CAP and assess how we can best improve these tools to better build up on resilience of the European agricultural system and to “de-risk” them for market players. In my eyes, the CAP should increasingly focus on incentives and instruments that foster long-term farm adaptation and resilience and, at the same time, that make insurance less risky and costly.

On top of risk management instruments, crisis preparedness and response tools are essential, as even the most effective risk prevention and management measures cannot avoid the occurrence of crises and shocks that farmers are not able to absorb alone, be they climatic, environmental, (geo)economic, or (geo)political. This is clearly stated in the recommendations put forward by the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU Agriculture.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will continue and deepen the recent efforts in the framework of the European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism, as a key contribution to the Union preparedness strategy when it comes to food supply and food security. In this context, I look forward to the upcoming Niinistö report on how to enhance Europe's civilian and defence preparedness and readiness, where food security should be considered as a critical component of any preparedness.

In terms of response, the Common Market Organisation exceptional measures and the agricultural reserve have provided timely support to EU farmers facing a wide variety of circumstances affecting their economic viability, from market disturbances due to geopolitical circumstances, to combating the spread of animal diseases and the impacts of unprecedented extreme adverse weather events and natural disasters. I believe crisis instruments are an important sign of public authorities' care and European solidarity with our farmers. Going forward, we need to ensure that crisis management and preparedness does not become a disincentive for farmers to adopting risk management strategies on their farms, e.g. switching to more resilient farming practices.

It will also be very important to continue and enhance the efforts to make our agricultural sector more resilient to climate change and in particular to extreme weather events like floods and droughts, but also to the overall heating and changes to precipitation patterns. A water resilient agricultural sector is not an option, it is a necessity, and I will work very closely with the Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy to design the Water Resilience Strategy, which will aim to help farmers achieve a water-smart agriculture.

CAP support remains essential for actions to improve soil health, (with positive effects on limiting erosion or creating sponge capacities that help combat both excess water and drought), to maintain and create landscape features which have mitigating effects, as well as to invest in better infrastructures for irrigation and water re-use, to support precision farming, and more resilient crops and varieties. New approaches at landscape level should be promoted. Similarly, a stronger role for advisory services throughout the EU territory is essential to support farmers engaging in more resilient practices and systems adapted to their local geographic and climatic exposure. These create win-win situations since they make insurance of farming businesses more attractive.

We should reward the farmers who contribute to the protection or restoration of our ecosystem services. While we will work in this direction for the post 2027 period, Member States have largely moved in this direction already now, for example through so called eco-schemes and agri-environmental and climate instruments.

I do believe more fundamental changes are needed in the most vulnerable regions. We will have to collectively anticipate longer term effects of climate change – notably on water resources – and make sure the sector adapts to achieve longer term resilience. This implies diversification or transformation of farms, development of new markets and dedicated research and innovation. You can count on my attention to that, too.

6. The agricultural sector has made major efforts in recent years and decades, including through targeted support under the CAP, to become more environmentally and climate friendly. Agriculture already makes an important contribution to implementing the EU's climate, biodiversity and environmental targets and it will continue to do so in the future, while taking into account the socio-economic reality, competitiveness and profitability of the agricultural and food sector. How do you intend to support farmers in this necessary process of change? Could this be done within the current CAP framework? Given the need for increased investment to ensure the sustainability of agricultural sector, do you see the need for an increased CAP budget and how would you ensure sufficient funding? What other public and private instruments do you think are needed to support farmers in providing public services?

We need to work together to ensure the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of our farming sector within the boundaries of our planet. We can only achieve this common goal if we jointly work on the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, environment-climate and social. Because these three dimensions are intertwined, we will not succeed by prioritising one dimension without making sure the others are also on track. This is the only way to secure the viability of the sector, long-term food security for European citizens through a plentiful supply of diverse, quality, and affordable food, as well as the sustainable management of natural resources and thriving rural areas.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I intend to build on what has been achieved so far, within the framework of the CAP strategic plans, as well as through initiatives taken as part of the Green Deal, acknowledging the efforts made by farmers and national administrations. As recently confirmed by the European Court of Auditors in its report on CAP strategic plans of 30 September 2024, the “green architecture” of the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans Regulation enables greater environmental and climate ambition in the CAP, but this potential needs to be better exploited through national plans. I will therefore support Member States in the efficient implementation of their CAP Strategic Plans, but I am also strongly committed to tackle weaknesses and to make the best use of the lessons learned, new evidence and feedback from stakeholders, in cooperation with the European Parliament and Member States.

That being said, I believe the CAP strategic plans are an appropriate tool to pursue CAP policy objectives in an integrated way, as Member States use them to prepare and deliver responses which are adapted to the challenges across their territories. The CAP – as the largest source of EU funding for the environment – can ensure that production and nature go hand in hand. This has translated into a higher ambition in several areas with 32% of the CAP funds dedicated to climate, environment and animal welfare objectives (close to EUR 97 billion of the CAP plans’ 2023-2027 allocation).

Unlike other sectors of the economy, agricultural production is based on, and inseparably linked to, nature and eco-systems. There are positive externalities generated by agriculture, such as maintenance of landscapes, economic activities in remote rural areas and positive contributions to biodiversity from certain farm practices. These need to be maintained. At the same time, we need to reduce negative externalities, sustainably manage natural resources and restore them where necessary. Soil health, adaptation to climate change, pollination, nutrient balance, decarbonisation and sustainable use of pesticides and fertilisers, as well as their alternatives, to name some key examples, are essential for long term viability. In many instances, profound changes in management may be necessary to adapt to climate change.

We cannot forget the CAP’s objective of a fair standard of living for the agricultural community and to ensure the availability of supplies at reasonable prices, as established in Art. 39 of the Treaty. We need to draw lessons from what the farmers have expressed in spring to design and deploy a new approach to deliver on sustainability, to support farmers decarbonising and preserving biodiversity.

I believe there is room to promote positive environmental and social outcomes through rewards and incentives for ecosystem services. In order to achieve all ambitions we will also need to better target support. A system of rewards and incentives for ecosystem services will be important for promoting positive environmental and social outcomes. With the future EU budget we need to ensure that the CAP is targeted and that the right balance between incentives, investments and regulation is established. In this context, I will specifically assess, among others, the best options in terms of conditionality for CAP payments and pay close attention to legislative initiatives in other domains that have a potential impact on the agricultural sector.

The Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU Agriculture considered that reaching the EU’s objectives in terms of agriculture and food production, rural development, climate neutrality, and biodiversity restoration requires to act and react in an effective and efficient way to achieve the priorities notably to strengthening the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the agricultural sector, EU’s food sovereignty and to making a real difference in our rural communities.

Given the transition and adaptation challenges of Europe’s agriculture, we need to look beyond the CAP to help finance and de-risk the transition. There are many farmers willing to invest and change, but they are not able to obtain commercial funding. This financing gap, estimated to be at EUR 62 billion (2022), has increased in the last years, with certain groups such as small or young farmers at a particular disadvantage. The gap is also significant when it comes to ‘green investments’, as they do not deliver an immediate return on investment. I intend to work closely with the European Investment Bank with a view to maximise public investment sources while leveraging and de-risking private capital. I will also encourage Member States to make better use of financial instruments within the CAP as well as of support for cutting edge innovation and knowledge-transfer.

I will further explore new business models and opportunities for additional sources of income for farmers, stemming from a climate-neutral and nature-positive economy, such as bioeconomy (valorising residues, waste or biomass) or carbon farming and biodiversity certification (carbon credits and nature credits). Becoming producers of renewable energy can also help farmers diversify their income. We also need to engage and share responsibility with the food and drink industry and consumers in our efforts. The food industry depends on farmers to obtain

their inputs: hence, it has an existential interest in a healthy, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector. This sector should therefore fairly contribute to rewarding farmers who produce agricultural products more sustainably.

7. What are your plans for developing the livestock sector while contributing to the climate action plan? How would you intend to boost innovation in this area? How would you ensure coherent and effective implementation of legislation aimed at reducing emissions affecting livestock sector, and how would you avoid multiple legal layers and additional administrative burden to farmers?

Livestock numbers in the EU continue to decline, by 7.8% in the last ten years, but this decline is not spread evenly across the EU. Bovine animals' numbers fell by 5%, pigs by 6%, sheep by 9% and goats by 15% (2023 compared to 2013).

Ensuring a sustainable and competitive livestock sector in the EU is not just an agricultural priority but a strategic objective that ties into broader goals of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It is a crucial pillar of the EU's agri-food system, contributing to food security, rural employment, and the preservation of diverse and beautiful landscapes across Europe, as well as of our cultural heritage. When it is based on family-run farms, it can play a pivotal role in maintaining rural vitality. In mountainous regions or areas with natural constraints, livestock farming is often the only viable economic activity. Without it, these areas could face land abandonment, greater depopulation, loss of employment, and economic stagnation. At the same time, livestock farming has well-known climate and environmental impacts on water, air, soil and nature that we need to address.

I intend to enhance the performance of the livestock sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability, by providing it with a conducive framework under the CAP, in coherence with other policies, in particular relating to climate and environment. I will ensure that this objective translates into a holistic approach that results in clear guiding principles to be implemented at farm level as well as throughout the supply chain. Reducing the administrative burden that weighs on farmers will be my constant preoccupation.

While agricultural emissions have been slightly declining in the EU over the past two decades, a trend that is expected to continue in the future, the livestock sector must pursue its transition to more sustainable practices. Likewise, it is important to highlight that, in some specific areas, the pressure of livestock has grown beyond the limits and action is necessary to bring back balance. This requires a comprehensive approach, and the CAP should continue to provide Member States with the tools to address those challenges, e.g. promotion of sustainable practices, creation of alternative business models, support for research and development, and uptake of new technologies.

Pasture-based systems, for instance, provide multiple environmental services. Grazing ruminants act as nature-based solutions, managing grassland biomass, reducing the risk of wildfires, and supporting carbon storage in the soil. Grazing animals help maintain the health of ecosystems by increasing soil fertility through the return of organic matter and nitrogen. Grazing also supports biodiversity, for example the manure left behind creates habitats for insects and birds. Furthermore, grass-based livestock systems contribute to carbon sequestration in soils, playing a role in mitigating climate change. Extensive livestock systems also provide a sustainable means of food production in territories where crop production is non-viable, further reinforcing their role in climate adaptation. These sustainable practices need to be supported and rewarded by the markets.

Tailored approaches that take into account local conditions, farming practices, and economic realities are essential.

While a lot of efforts have been made, further reduction of emissions is needed. We will start first by improving measurement of GHG emissions, both at farm and national level, to allow to have consolidated data at EU level. We need to better capture the effects of good practices on the reduction of agricultural emissions, as these are not sufficiently recognised by the markets or in the national GHG inventories. Additionally, technological innovation will play a crucial role in this transition. Precision farming, dedicated breeding programmes, improved animal health practices, methane-reducing feed additives, manure management, integrated grazing management and innovative feed solutions will all be critical in reducing the environmental footprint of livestock farming. I will be particularly attentive to the research and innovation programme that is up and running, and will make sure that its promising results are made available to all; those climate-friendly approaches should be implemented in the field.

There are several guiding principles for the future of the sector: scientific evidence, stakeholder consultations, and technological innovation. In designing long-term perspectives for the sector, I will make sure that discussions are based on robust scientific evidence, so that policy decisions are informed by facts, and all stakeholders - including

farmers, consumers, civil society, scientists and policymakers - are involved in shaping the future of the sector and translate innovation into practice.

As previously mentioned, if I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will prepare a Vision for Agriculture and Food in the first 100 days of the new mandate, building on the recommendations of the Strategic Dialogue, and the future of livestock will be an integral part of this. By supporting innovation, promoting tailored solutions, we can build a resilient and sustainable future for EU livestock farming.

Question from the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

8. How will you deliver on the environmental and climate (GHG including methane) objectives, while ensuring the economic and social sustainability of EU farmers, as well as their role in securing EU food security? Can you provide details on the proposed benchmarking system for sustainable certification schemes to harmonise methodologies on farm sustainability assessments? What criteria will it be based on? How will it reduce the administrative burden on the sector? How do you envisage achieving the EU's 2030 target for organic farming? How do you plan to work together with the Commissioner on Health and Animal Welfare on the One Health approach, and on the legislative framework for sustainable food systems? On the latter point, do you plan to include this proposal in the Commission Work Programme for 2025? How will you ensure that this legislative framework addresses the entire range of stakeholders and takes an integrated approach to promoting sustainability across the value chain from agriculture, to reducing food waste, to animal welfare, and to healthier sustainable diets and high-quality food?

Given the impact of agriculture and food systems on climate and the environment, we need a joint and coherent approach on how different parts of the food system contribute to climate objectives and address environmental challenges. Agriculture, as any other sector, needs to play its part. Food production is based on, and inextricably linked to, nature and ecosystems. Without healthy soils, there is no income for our farmers.

To ensure results on environmental and climate objectives, a stronger focus on incentives and investments is necessary to achieve the right balance between incentives, investments and regulation. It is therefore my intention to build on the already important efforts on environment and climate realised within the current CAP support framework - jointly within the environmental and climate laws approved or on the table, including the Nature Restoration Regulation. For the sake of agriculture itself, we need to effectively ensure soil fertility, reduce nutrient losses and bring back biodiversity and its services, without penalising farmers.

Under the CAP, further attention should be given to emissions, first by improving measurement of GHG emissions, both at national and at farm level, to allow to have consolidated data at EU level. We need to better capture the effects of good practices on the reduction of agricultural emissions, as a lot of efforts have already been made: these are not sufficiently recognised by the markets or in the national GHG inventories. Secondly, the reduction of emissions in agriculture, including methane, will require strengthening certain tools under the CAP and further targeting of support, including on specific territories or animal husbandry, as well as manure management innovations.

There are opportunities for environmentally sustainable and economically viable farming, as demonstrated by the organic sector. I am very confident about the sector's potential in the EU. I intend to maintain focus on the development of the sector. Today, CAP Strategic Plans provide for substantial support and ambitious targets for the organic sector and it will be important to maintain support to facilitate conversion as well as maintenance of organic farming. We need to be equally attentive to supporting the development of market demand for organic products and to encouraging consumption, for example through promotion policy or changes to public procurement rules.

There are clear interconnections between the health of humans, animals, plants, and the environment, as reflected in the One Health approach. Keeping a holistic approach is increasingly needed to preserve the long-term resilience of the EU food system, but we need to achieve this long-term objective with a new approach to sustainability, as also recommended by the Strategic Dialogue. Rather than new legislative proposals, we can achieve our objectives by better implementing and enforcing existing legislation while using incentives and new market-based tools to promote change. In doing this, I intend to work closely with the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, as well as with the Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, the Commissioners for Environment, Water resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, and others.

A pragmatic, bottom-up approach, taking into account the specific needs of farmers, will be central. Among others, I intend to work with farmers, all food supply chain actors, consumer representatives and science to develop a harmonised on-farm sustainability assessment – the benchmarking system. Drawing on existing public and private systems and taking into account on-farm realities, this can help farmers record sustainability data only once, thereby reducing administrative burden. It would improve the ability of farmers to benchmark their sustainability performance and bring out the tensions that exist between different dimensions of sustainability. It could serve as the basis for potential public or private sustainability schemes, as set out in the Strategic Dialogue report. The establishment of an EU-wide benchmarking system in the agri-food sector will be a tool to encourage farmers to engage in sustainable practices and enable them to demonstrate this to get better remuneration from the market. The Strategic Dialogue also identifies promoting a shift towards more balanced diets as key to the health and well-being of citizens. If confirmed, I will collaborate with the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare to advance in this area, while recognizing the limits to the EU competencies on food consumption. Moreover, food has a strong social and cultural dimension: national and regional authorities are best placed to act, being responsible for education, public health and taxation, which are key elements in supporting sustainable and healthy diets. Nevertheless, there are areas where the EU can add value and support or complement these efforts.

I am determined to pursue the EU promotion programme for agricultural and food products in line with the overall support of the Member States and the European Parliament.

Furthermore, I am also determined to continue and further enhance the effectiveness of the EU School Scheme. It is one of those unique instruments at EU level that reaches out to the most important audience, namely school children, who should not only benefit from a variety of healthy agricultural products, such as fruit and vegetables and dairy, but also learn more about farming, the environment and balanced diets. Furthermore, our EU public procurement rules enable public authorities procuring food to take certain sustainability criteria into account. On this aspect too I am committed to working with the executive Vice-President for Prosperity and industrial strategy and the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare.

Improved animal welfare of farmed animals has tangible benefits for farmers, notably the reduction of risks of outbreaks of diseases, as well as the reduction of the use of medicinal products with a positive impact on reducing antimicrobial resistance, morbidity and mortality rates, as well as higher profitability of livestock farming. The current CAP supports farmers to achieve higher levels of animal welfare and health. If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, notably to modernise rules on animal welfare, in line with scientific, environmental, economic and social factors.

On food waste, if I am confirmed as Commissioner, together with the Commissioner for Environment as well as the Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare, I am committed to accelerate the EU's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal Target 12.3 of halving global food waste at retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses by 2030, addressing integration of food waste/loss in all relevant policy areas, including agriculture. I will support further action leading to reducing food waste and loss.

Question from the Committee on Fisheries

9. When implementing your portfolio, how will you take into consideration the importance of the EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors, their contribution to EU food sovereignty and the protection of marine ecosystems, both in the short and long term?

The fisheries and aquaculture sectors are a fundamental pillar of many communities across the continent, playing a crucial role for food security, as well as for employment and economic activity in multiple regions.

Despite this, we import close to 70% of all fishery and aquaculture products consumed in the EU. European aquaculture production remains relatively low and stable, despite its huge potential.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will closely collaborate with the Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans to ensure that the Vision for Agriculture and Food takes fishery and aquaculture in due consideration. We will also work jointly with the Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms to improve attractiveness of both rural and coastal areas for present and future generations.

To ensure food security, the EU needs to promote a competitive, sustainable and resilient fisheries and aquaculture sector and preserve the vitality of our rural, coastal and riverside areas. We must also keep in mind that our seas are heavily impacted by what happens on land. For instance, nutrient losses have negative impacts on both

agriculture and the ocean, implying costs for fishing and tourism. I firmly believe that we should choose a holistic approach to the food system in general, taking into account both agriculture as well as fisheries and aquaculture. Consumers play a key role in accompanying this transition. Price remains a key-driver of their consumption decisions. It is important to create a suitable enabling environment where more sustainable practices are rewarded by the market. Information to consumers remains an area where further work will help a smooth sustainability transition: we need to work together in areas such as possibly more detailed origin labelling.