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ARC2020 Press Release: Citizens speak out!

The status quo is not an option! We need sustainable, resilient food systems, not defence of vested self-interests

ARC2020, the broad alliance of civil society organisations and networks,[i] today called upon the citizens of Europe to continue fighting for a truly sustainable Common Agricultural Policy - as vested self-interests threaten to sabotage this unique opportunity to create positive change in the way we eat and produce our food, consume natural resources, and use public funds, while ensuring fair incomes and economically viable rural areas.

Reacting to the legislative proposals for the future CAP, ARC welcomes the recognition by the European Commission of the grave challenges posed by climate change and increasing pressure on the world's resources. But the ARC believes, especially in the wake of fierce interventions by Member States, that the proposals fall short of delivering the vision, strategy and concrete goals of a truly sustainable food and farming policy. They also fail to fulfil the aspirations expressed by European citizens, illustrated by recent Eurobarometer survey results[ii].

The ARC therefore calls upon the people of Europe, in their capacity as taxpayers, consumers or producers, to demand a far bolder and more long-sighted CAP. Nat Page, speaking for ARC, said:

"Short-termism and vested interests should not be allowed to blunt the vision of a truly sustainable and equitable future. Business as usual will see Europe continuing down a dangerous road of excessive consumption of the world's resources and grave damage to the environment, while the socio-economic fabric of rural areas further disintegrates. We, and the organisations in our alliance, will continue to mobilise Europe's citizens to pressure their elected representatives for a profound reform."

In the ARC's view, the new programming period should see a progressive shift from industrialised agriculture and centralised food industry, to sustainable farming everywhere and a diversified pattern of regional and local production and consumption. We welcome the Commission's intention to shift to resource-efficient local food production based on biologically diverse agro-ecosystems resilient to climate change. But the proposals do not yet address the massive dependence of agriculture on fossil fuels and imported feedstuffs. The proposals ought to be "greening" the CAP, but do not stimulate the shift to truly sustainable methods of farming, such as substantial compulsory crop rotation including legumes which can also boost farmers' income[iii]. They do not pursue rigorously the EU commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity. And rather than coming up with market measures to ensure fair prices for farmers and consumers, they propose insurance schemes which would only serve to line the pockets of insurers and the financial system and raise farmers' production costs further.

As for the rural development proposals, the ARC also welcomes the movement towards multi-funded local development strategies, drawing from different EU funds. However, the proposals do not promote the economic, social and environmental renaissance of rural areas that we called for last November. The rural development measures provide no strong impetus towards multi-sectoral development. They do not adequately provide assurance of effective support for the rural poor and vulnerable, or for sustaining the social vitality of communities based on subsistence and semi-subsistence farming.

Disappointingly, the proposals do not address the detrimental impacts of the CAP on global food security, development and resource management, and the continued support for unsustainable, industrial export strategies dependent on cheap imports of agricultural commodities.

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Notes for Editors

[i] ARC, the Agricultural and Rural Convention 2020, was created in early 2010 as a platform to enable concerned citizens and their organisations to advocate a sustainable reform of the Common Agricultural and Rural Development policies of the European Union. Active within the platform is a wide array of civil society organisations, at European, national, regional and

local level. They represent a great variety of interests, including human rights, farmers, consumers, rural communities, nature protection, cultural heritage, animal welfare, minorities, public health and organic food. www.arc2020.eu

[ii] Special Eurobarometer 327 (Sept. 2011) What Europeans think of agriculture and the CAP: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/survey/index_en.htm

- almost half of all EU citizens (47%) support an upper limit on subsidies;
- only 10% of people questioned thought that payments should not be linked to environmental conditions, with 58% backing a link between payments & environmental protection all across the EU;
- 90% those questioned agree that buying local products is beneficial and that the EU should help to promote their availability;
- 65% of respondents agree that there are benefits in buying mountain products.

Special Eurobarometer 372 (Oct. 2011) Climate Change : http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_300_full_en.pdf

- Climate change remains a key concern for the European public, greater than when the last special climate survey was conducted in 2009.
- Just over half (51%) of respondents consider climate change one of the world's most serious problems (20% feel it is the single most serious problem). Overall it is seen as the second most serious issue facing the world, after poverty, hunger and lack of drinking water, and a more serious problem than the economic situation.
- 89% see climate change as a serious problem, with 68% considering it a very serious problem (up from 64% in 2009). On a scale of 1 to 10, Europeans rank the seriousness of climate change at 7.4 (against 7.1 in 2009).

Special Eurobarometer 365 (June 2011) Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment :

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_365_pres_en.pdf

- Asked to choose 5 issues they are worried about, respondents chose: water pollution (41%), air pollution (36%), climate change (34%), health impacts of chemicals (34%), depletion of natural resources (33%), agricultural pollution (pesticides, fertilizers, etc) (25%), loss of biodiversity (22%), GMO (19%), consumption habits (19%).
- 76% respondents agreed that environmental problems have a direct affect on their daily lives.
- Big polluters (corporations and industry) should be responsible for protecting the environment (91% agreed).

[iii]Cutting farmers' dependence on costly inputs such as synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, soya and fuel can increase profit margins, while increased humus from manuring and crop rotation boosts soil fertility and resilience to droughts and floods.

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