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EU farmers warn the European Union: This is what is needed for stable food sovereignty in the EU!

(Brussels, 21 March 2022) The events of the last weeks have shocked people around the world. In addition to the aggression by the Russian President against a sovereign country and its people, the war in Ukraine has also laid bare the risks that come with dependence in the energy and food sectors. Everyone is talking about a turning point, about the need to rethink and rework old patterns and policies.

In terms of EU agriculture, there is now a strong focus on moving toward autonomous self-sufficiency, lowering the dependence on other countries, and thus establishing robust food sovereignty. While all of us are observing the rapid rise in energy, feed and food prices with much concern, fears of food shortages due to external conflicts and dependencies are also growing. The appeal to local farmers to produce more and more independently is growing ever louder.

However: Robust food sovereignty is impossible with the current system still in place!

The European Milk Board therefore calls for a political and economic systemic change to lay a strong foundation for significantly more independent EU food production.

"The current system has basically run agriculture and farmers into the ground. For many years now, prices have been far from cost coverage and this has pushed a large number of producers into debt or completely out of business. *Food-sovereign* production is not possible in these conditions," says Sieta van Keimpema, President of the European Milk Board (EMB).

In a recently-published [study](#) on the evolution of margins in the milk sector, the severe price collapse over multiple decades has been clearly documented. For example, the net margin in 1989, excluding remuneration for farmers and family labour, was 12.36 cents per kilogramme of milk, while in 2019, it was down to merely 4.17 cents. When we include even a modest farmer remuneration in the calculation, the Net Economic Margin I also highlights the disastrous economic situation on farms: From 3.79 cents in 1989, the margin collapsed to -4.96 cents per kilogramme of milk in 2019. And these figures do not even take into account the current galloping costs. In Denmark (as of February 2022), for example, electricity costs have tripled since autumn last year, and diesel and fertilizer prices have doubled. These developments are only aggravating the situation and further increasing the gap between prices and costs.

These unequivocal figures are further evidence of the fact that EU policy-makers, numerous banks and multinationals have taken many wrong decisions over the last 20 years and have thus created an agricultural sector on which the next generation *must* turn its back.

Robust food sovereignty is only possible through a systemic change in agriculture:

- Producer prices must cover costs.
- Stable, fair remuneration for farmers must be included in cost coverage.
- Programmes like the [Market Responsibility Programme \(MRP\)](#) must be implemented in order to make crises in the agricultural sector a thing of the past.

Robust food sovereignty is only possible with robust farms

As EMB Vice-President Kjartan Poulsen underlines, we now need to create a framework that facilitates cost-covering prices, so that farmers in the EU have the necessary foundation to work and produce appropriately. He says that we cannot stop at empty promises like the ones made during the COVID-19 pandemic. On this issue, Poulsen says: "During the pandemic, producers did not fault in their job of providing the Union with food, in spite of the difficult situation. However, the poor economic and social conditions in the agricultural sector were never really taken up by policy-makers or industry, let alone improved in any way."

The only way to create robust food sovereignty in the EU as well as sustainable production conditions is through systemic change. Sieta van Keimpema calls for decisive action from all relevant policy and market stakeholders: "The long-standing orientation toward cheap exports and the dependency on imports – while local farmers struggle with one crisis after the next – do not constitute a healthy foundation to take on the task that we are now faced with in the EU. Farmers must shift back toward more autonomy and to make this possible, farmers in the EU need to be in a much better position. We need to do everything in our power to minimise external risks for our citizens, for all of us in the European Union."

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[<<< back](#)