



**FRANS TIMMERMANS**  
First Vice-President

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Dear Honourable Members,

I would like to thank you very much for your letter of 12 July 2016 calling for an assessment of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). You raise many important issues for the future of EU agriculture which I am happy to discuss with you. Please accept our apologies for the delay in replying to you.

Today's CAP has evolved considerably from the policy that was created almost 60 years ago to ensure, among others, food security for European citizens. The demands of consumers, environmentalists and other stakeholders now have an important influence on the way producers run their businesses and the CAP has evolved in parallel to address these concerns.

You highlight many of the challenging trends and flag the need to know how the CAP impacts on these and how the policy is delivering the benefits that citizens and taxpayers expect from it. The Commission has put in place – together with the Member States – a Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the CAP. This framework will provide solid information on the impact of the policy, which will be measured in relation to the overarching objectives of the CAP: viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action and balanced territorial development.

As part of the above framework over the next two years the Commission has planned to carry out a number of evaluations, which will examine the impact of all relevant CAP measures against the policy's objectives. For example, the results of the following evaluations are expected to become available in 2017: evaluation of the payment for agricultural practices beneficial for the climate and the environment (“greening” of direct payments); evaluation of the impact of the CAP measures towards the general objective of viable food production; evaluation of forestry measures under the rural development policy; synthesis of the rural development ex-post evaluations 2007-2013.

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In line with the Commission Better Regulation Guidelines the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value of EU regulatory and spending measures are fundamental for these and for all Commission evaluations.

A number of studies are also in the pipeline (e.g. study on the European Innovation Partnership; studies on consistency between European Structural and Investment Funds ESIF) and other EU policies and simplification of ESIF delivery mechanisms; mapping and first analysis of the implementation of the CAP 2014-2020; study on administrative burden of the CAP).

Based on the evidence gathered through the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (including the above-mentioned evaluations and studies), the Commission will present a report on the performance of the CAP to the Council and the European Parliament in 2018 as well as in 2021, in accordance with Art. 110 of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013.

In addition, agriculture has been identified as one of the short-term priorities of the REFIT Platform which brings together high level experts from Member States, civil society representatives, including from the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to advise the Commission on how to improve the efficiency of EU legislation and its implementation, with a strong focus on reducing regulatory burden. The Platform has adopted opinions in June and is considering opinions on the CAP in September. The Commission will take account of these opinions in the preparation of its work programme for 2017, due for adoption on 25 October this year. The letter of intent sent to President Schulz on 14 September already mentions the "Modernisation and Simplification of the Common Agriculture Policy to maximise its contribution to the Commission's political priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals".

In all efforts to discuss and assess the CAP, it is important to distinguish between those elements which the CAP can influence and those beyond its reach. Some of the assertions you make cannot only be attributed to the CAP. For example, some Member States tend to have larger farms for legal and historical reasons. The CAP contains a number of provisions which allow Member States to alter the distribution of payments among beneficiaries. The reduction of payments over a certain threshold is obligatory but Member States may go further by capping direct payments. They also have the possibility to implement the redistributive payment which tilts support towards smaller scale holdings. Not all Member States use all options available.

Turning to the question of natural resources, they are undoubtedly under great pressure – but not only by agriculture. That is why the CAP places greater emphasis on care for the environment and climate though there is more work to be done.

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On the other hand the suggestion that the CAP has a negative impact on public health is tenuous since healthy diets are influenced by complex, culturally determined tastes and preferences where education of consumers plays the most crucial role in diet shifts.

Indeed, with the CAP and associated policies we are trying to strike the right balance between economic, social and environmental dimensions to ensure a sustainable European future. I therefore welcome your views so that ideas can be shared in the context of the debate on the future of the CAP and my services will be happy to engage in these discussions.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping letters that appear to read 'FT' followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Frans TIMMERMANS