



Brussels  
31 March 2020

## **European Green Deal needs to cut pesticides and switch to agroecology**

To: Executive Vice President Timmermans

Cc: Commissioners Kyriakides, Wojciechowski and Sinkevičius

We are writing to you as supporters of the European Citizens Initiative *Save Bees and Farmers*<sup>1</sup> which has been already supported by over a quarter of a million EU citizens.

The significant decline of bees and pollinators in Europe and worldwide, together with the wider collapse of biodiversity we are currently witnessing has rightly raised alarm in the scientific community and general public. Experts have declared that “business as usual” cannot remain an option<sup>2,3</sup>. It is now finally widely accepted that our food production model is a major driver of this ecology collapse, largely because of the massive use of synthetic pesticides it relies upon.

Furthermore, synthetic pesticides have important consequences on human health, linked to illness among rural communities as well as among consumers via pesticide residues that are present in food, as well as pesticide drift in the air and runoff in soil and groundwater. Among others, exposure to pesticides is linked to cancer, Parkinson's disease, and reproductive impairments.

A third major consequence of industrial agriculture is the sharp decline in social and economic diversity amongst farmers and rural communities. Over the past 10 years, a farm has disappeared in the EU on average every 3 minutes. This is leading to depleted rural areas and a huge loss of resilience, valuable knowledge and traditions.

The European Union has supported these phenomena with public money for decades through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as well as with regulations, trade agreements and a research policy favoring industrial agriculture and food production. Our coalition now asks for the European Commission and the Member States to make a fundamental change in how the aforementioned instruments are used.

These issues are at the core of why the European Commission is developing the Farm to Fork and accompanying Biodiversity Strategies. Indeed, a way out exists to transform our model of chemical-intensive agriculture to a model that is more knowledge-intensive and that is based on working with nature rather than against it: this alternative has been developed by organic agriculture as well as many other farmers, based on agroecological principles.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.savebeesandfarmers.eu](http://www.savebeesandfarmers.eu)

<sup>2</sup> Climate change and land. IPCC special report. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services. IPBES. 2019



Scientific research shows that feeding the EU and the world based on synthetic pesticide-free agriculture is possible<sup>4,5</sup>, it is a political choice as non-chemical alternatives to pesticides already exist. Furthermore, field evidence shows that implementing agroecology allows farmers to increase their profits<sup>6</sup>.

We are therefore calling on you to ensure the demands of *Save Bees and Farmers* are embedded in these forthcoming strategies. In particular, they must without compromise:

1. start the **phase-out of synthetic pesticides from EU agriculture**, by setting a target to **cut use by 80% by 2030** and a **phase out by 2035**.
2. set ambitious targets to **restore biodiversity**, especially in agricultural areas. Agriculture and biodiversity are not mutually exclusive, but must benefit each other.
3. **support farmers in the transition** towards a nature-friendly agriculture. CAP reform proposals must be strongly upgraded to support farmers financially and technically by prioritizing small scale, diverse and sustainable farming based on agroecology.

We look forward to the publication of ambitious and credible Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies that are fit for purpose, lead us away from the catastrophe we are facing, and meet the expectations of citizens and farmers. Time is running out for both nature and small-scale farming and we call on these to be central to your efforts.

Yours sincerely,

**Amigos de la Tierra España;** Andrés Muñoz, Food Sovereignty Campaigner

**ANGiV Sicilia;** Anna Spitaleri, President

**APIMONDIA Bee Health Commission;** Fani Hatjina, President of Bee Health Commission

**Apis Domus;** Andreia Valente, CEO

**Apiservices;** Gilles Ratia, President

**Armenian women for health and healthy environment;** Elena Manvelyan, President

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**Bündnis für eine enkeltaugliche Landwirtschaft e.V.;** Johanna Bär, Managing Director

**Bürgerinitiative Landwende e.V.;** Johannes Heimrath, President

**Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL);** David Azoulay, Director of Environmental Health Program

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<sup>4</sup> [Strategies for feeding the world more sustainably with organic agriculture](#). Muller A *et al.* Nat Commun. 2017.

<sup>5</sup> An agroecological Europe in 2050: multifunctional agriculture for healthy eating. Findings from the Ten Years for Agroecology (TYFA) modelling exercise. IDDRI edition. 2018

<sup>6</sup> The economic potential of agroecology: Empirical evidence from Europe. Van der Ploeg *et al.* Journal of rural studies. 2019



**Comitato Marcia Stop Pesticidi TV/BL;** Garbelotto Renato, Mario Azzalini, Lisa Trinca, Presidents  
**Compassion in World Farming;** Olga Kikou, Head of EU office  
**Corporate Europe Observatory;** Nina Holland, Researcher  
**Deutscher Naturschutzring;** Ilka Dege, Coordinator for Biodiversity  
**Dutch Bee Conservation;** Maaïke Molenaar, Chairman  
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**Ecologistas en Acción España;** Koldo Hernández, Chemical Policy Officer  
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**GLOBAL 2000 - Friends of the Earth Austria;** Helmut Burtscher-Schaden, Chairperson  
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**Greenpeace;** Magda Stoczkiewicz, Deputy Director, Greenpeace European Unit  
**Grup de Consum Eco La Panera;** Daniel Méndez, President  
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**Health and Environment Justice Support (HEJSupport);** Alexandra Caterbow, Co-Director  
**Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe;** Dorota Napierska, Chemicals Policy & Projects Officer  
**Hogar sin Tóxicos;** Carlos de Prada, director  
**International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) EU group;** Eduardo Cuoco, Director  
**Justice Pesticides;** Arnaud Apoteker, Délégué Général  
**Legambiente;** Angelo Gentili, Agriculture responsible  
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**Slow Food Germany;** Sharon Sheets, Press and Communications Officer  
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**Tilt! Changemaking Network;** Teo Comet, Tilt Coordinator  
**Umweltinstitut München;** Fabian Holzheid, Political Director  
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**WWF Spain;** Celsa Peiteado, Head of Agriculture and Food Programme  
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**Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft;** Benedikt Haerlin, Office Manager (Berlin)