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## **For an active policy at EU level to support young farmers**

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Conference "Sowing the Seeds to Harvest in Future: Supporting Young People into Farming" organised by the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)

**Brussels, 12 April 2012**

Hello and thank you for allowing me to speak during your seminar today.

You've known from the start that I've wanted to make "Young Farmers" central to the post-2013 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. And it is a subject to which I gave much attention while preparing the legislative proposals presented last October.

I've had close contact with your representatives in order to find the best means to encourage installation based on your experience on the ground. We must not stop half-way. It is a subject we must continue to deal with until the final adoption of the reform. I'm also very pleased that in opening its doors to this event, the European Parliament is showing the importance which it, too, places on young farmers.

Installation is key to the future of European agriculture. If agriculture does not provide future prospects to young farmers, one might wonder what kind of future European agriculture has. I know that taking over a farm is a particularly difficult, complex and demanding time. It not only requires increasingly technical expertise on the part of the young people, but also a large financial capacity. This capacity for investment is clearly a limiting factor for many young people, particularly in zones where access to farmland is increasingly difficult.

However, we must remember that despite the tools we have today within the context of CAP, we've lost almost 3 million farmers over the last ten years. This makes it important to move up a gear and put a proactive policy in place on a European level to support the arrival of new farmers in the agricultural sector, allowing them either to create new businesses or take over a business, that is, a farm, whose owners have retired.

In order to do this, we must provide financial support with an installation subsidy and facilitate access to bank loans. I proposed that Member States put in place, within their Rural Development Programme, a sub-programme aimed at young farmers. This is a special aspect of this legislative proposal. This will allow us to support them more intensely through co-financing specifically for young people, thus supporting young people in their investments and also supporting the training of young people. This is the key element of this sub-programme proposal: to give young people a different set of measures when it comes to co-financing.

As well as expanding measures for young people within Rural Development Programmes, we have made a proposal which I see as very significant. It is in the context of Pillar I: direct payment.

Following many exchanges we've had with young farmers, and from our own analysis of how to support the cash flow of young farmers in the first years after installation at a farm, we have proposed an increase in the level of direct payments during the first five years of activity for young farmers who set up an enterprise and ask for this help.

I sometimes hear that this measure should be voluntary for Member States. But the political aim of this measure would be severely weakened if it is not obligatory for all Member States. It would mean not having a collective approach for the whole EU. We must focus on young farmers' problems, not borders within the EU.

All the Member States are concerned. All young people must be able to benefit from these specific measures all over Europe. Making this an optional measure within the first Pillar would be a way of accepting that there is discrimination among young farmers in the EU, according to the criteria of their nationality, and according to where in Europe they set up their farm.

I continue to firmly support the idea that every young person who goes into farming and who fulfils certain criteria must be able to benefit from support. If the agricultural policy is to remain collective, as well as the agricultural market to which the young people will belong, the policy supporting installation of young people must also be collective. Thus, it must be applicable in all the Member States.

Our efforts to explain and reason must continue to ensure that the final reform package maintains the proposal of the Commission and keeps it obligatory across Europe.

Beyond this measure, there are also future organisational CAP measures, measures to manage the crisis, improve promotion for agricultural produce, and research and innovation, which I know young people are often more aware of than others in agriculture. I hope these measures will encourage young people to invest time and resources in the agricultural sector.

Farming is not always an easy profession. However, it is a very satisfying profession. Europe must make this clear: We need our farmers.

Thank you for your dynamism and commitment, in creating today's agriculture, and especially also creating and giving prospects to agriculture in the coming years.

I wish you good luck and the time to reflect on your work. Most importantly, let's keep striving for our goal with the ideas which we've developed together.